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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

OUT OF SILENCE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A FEMINIST VOICE FOR THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF ADOLESCENTS

by

BARBARA RICE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph.D.

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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IN MEMORIAM

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ABSTRACT

The context for this study arose first of all from a deeply felt question of my own. What does it mean for me as a woman, who names herself as a Christian feminist, to teach religious education within the Roman Catholic tradition?

I was very fortunate to find another female religious educator who because of her own experience as a Catholic could share with me the pain and joy underlying this question. She agreed to be my partner-in-conversation for this study by allowing me to participate with her in her grade nine religion class. We also spent considerable time sharing our interpretations of what happened in the class as well as in relating the classroom experiences to our own lives as adults.

The intent of this study was to explore ways of engaging in religious education that allow and indeed encourage the voicing of the Christian Story as fully inclusive of women. Our basic educational question was: What is the significance of a feminist voice for the religious education of adolescents? As noted many times in this study the metaphor of "voice" is an important one in terms of women learning to speak for themselves as women.

Four themes emerged out of this study: Equality Equals?, Going Out with Smart Girls, Could Jesus be a Girl?, and Casting the First Stone. These themes relate the learning and unlearning that we as religious educators realized we needed to do in order to continue exploring our question with young people. These same themes also pointed out the need to ask two important questions with respect to the contemporary approach to teaching religious education: Whose Life Experience, Whose Christian Story?

In a spirit of hope both the teacher and myself believe that the answer to both these questions can and must voice the experiences of women as integral to the sharing of the Christian message. I invite readers to continue the conversation begun in this study.

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I owe special thanks to Dr. Therese Craig who knows my story from the inside and who was a constant source of encouragement.

I am honoured to have had Dr. Maria Harris as my outside examiner. She is a creative and deeply spiritual educator. I have benefitted much from her own work.

This study could not have been done without Maria, my partner in conversation. Although she is a busy classroom teacher she was very generous with her time and offered me valuable insights.

Finally, I wish to thank those community members and close friends who journeyed with me through the painful yet hope-filled search that accompanied this study.

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SECTION ONE: THE STUDY

CHAPTER ONE

COMING TO THE QUESTION

Hearing My Own Voice

"I discover immediately a silence about women, by women and towards women. Often it is a deafening silence. The language excludes me" (Harris, 1987, p. 101). This study reflects my own dwelling in a question about silence in the last few years that has disturbed me both as a Christian woman in the Roman Catholic tradition and as a religious educator. My reflection is best told through a story.

I am listening to a homily on the importance of vocations to the priesthood. We are told that churches may soon be closing even in urban centers. We might have to get used to only celebrating the Eucharist once a month. The priest may not always be available when we want him. We must start praying for vocations and actively encouraging young men to think about the priesthood. I find my temperature rising, fluctuating between anger and helplessness. I am tempted to stand up and shout out something like, "What if I don't believe in praying for a totally male priesthood anymore? Isn't it possible to at least recognize the possibility of women priests? Have you ever thought about how some women might be feeling excluded by your statements?" I also have the greatest urge just to simply walk away. I don't do either of these things probably because I have been too well socialized to "behave" in church. But there is a deeper reason also. This church, this tradition is my home. At present I am unable to leave it. What the future holds I do not know.

Because I stay I find myself trying, as with other similar situations, to put my discomfort at being absent from this homily to work in terms of my profession as a religious educator. During this homily my eyes have been riveted on two young girls sitting with their father in front of me. Like me they sit quietly. Hopefully, they are not listening. If they are, what do they think? Are they so socialized into the silence about them that the words of the priest are not offensive? Or, are they sitting there thinking that this is one more irrelevant message from the "old boys' club" as the daughter of a colleague of mine refers to the church. In either case I ask myself what the two girls and I might do with this experience in a religious education class the next day. Is there something to say out of the silence? I find a clue to this answer in my own action after church.

Somehow I knew that I couldn't leave without telling the priest my experience on hearing this homily. I was aware that in risking to share the vulnerability of my pain I might also be causing pain. Yet I sensed the conversation would be beneficial for both of us. I explained to him that I knew that it was part of our church tradition to pray for male vocations to the priesthood and that my reaction was not intended to be a rejection of that in itself. However, the exclusivity of the reference to males without any recognition of the fact that this could be difficult for women to hear was not fair to people like myself who wish to remain loyal to the tradition. I did not expect structures and traditions to change overnight. I did want my experience to be taken into account as a way of contributing to change. The priest thanked me for telling my story and said that he should have and would recognize this story, the story of many women in our church, in future preaching. I left feeling a small sense of hope in having spoken out and in the freeing discovery of hearing my own voice I began to form the educational question for this study.

Myself As Writer

Before presenting this question to you, the reader and interpreter of my work, it is only fair that you know something about me as writer, the first interpreter of my work. Who is this woman who reacts in a particular way to a sermon on the priesthood? Who is this woman who is beginning to name herself as a Christian feminist? It is fair that you have an opportunity to know at least partial answers to these questions for two reasons.

Bias - cutting Across the Cloth

First, this study emerges out of the silence of questing and searching for what it means to hear my own voice as a woman within the context of membership in the Roman Catholic Church and as a consultant and teacher of religious education within that faith tradition. My study is therefore deliberately biased. It is conceived and nurtured out of a particular view of myself, my church, my world.

This biased way of writing is supported by feminist writers who hold that not only is it not possible to do value free research but that it is not desirable to want to do so. Such an approach, generally referred to as purely objective, ignores the importance of the inter-relationship of the subject who poses the question with the reality of who or what is being researched. Feminist researchers unequivocally state that there is a bias to their research, a "conscious partiality" of themselves as subjects striving for self definition in a male-defined society (Weiler, 1988; Oakely, 1981). As Nelle Morton states: "It is not wrong to be partial. The wrongness comes when the partial parades as the whole" (1985, p. 181). This fact of partiality is not recognized by those who claim that the objective approach assumes, for example, that we all see or know

in the same way. It is interesting to note that while a dictionary definition of bias generally offers a pejorative connotation such as "warped or prejudiced, an opinion formed without adequate reason," the meaning of bias in sewing (traditionally viewed as women's work) presents a helpful imagery for feminist self-expression. "Cloth is cut on the bias when it is cut diagonally across the weave." The Christian feminist story is cut across, in contra-movement to, much of the weaving of the cloth of the Christian story over the last two thousand years. As such, the feminist story suggests another way of working with the cloth. This way of working, as in the case of cutting material on the bias, allows more "give" to the telling of the Christian story. I therefore tell you at the beginning of this study that I chose to do my work out of a bias of my own. My understanding of myself is as woman (a white, middle class woman) and religious educator within the Roman Catholic tradition.

Seeking Self-expression

A second reason for sharing something about myself as writer is that my use of the imagery of "feminist voice" is intended to speak of the consciousness of who I am as a woman and what this means for my being "body subject" in the world. The term "body-subject" was invented by Merleau Ponty (Phenomenology of Perception, 1962) as a way of speaking about human consciousness. The term is intended as a reaction against philosophical postures, such as idealism, that divorce the mind from the body when speaking of consciousness. "Body-subject" is a helpful way for feminists to speak of their own consciousness as experienced in the bodiliness of being woman. As Madeleine Grumet states: "He (Merleau Ponty) called it knowledge in the hands and knowledge in the feet. It is also knowledge in the womb (1988, p. 3). The meaning of feminist consciousness will be explored further in Chapter Four.

My consciousness is something that has only emerged slowly. It is, in fact, continuing to seek a language for self-definition in the very writing of this study. As Susan Stanford Friedman states in regard to women's auto-biographical writings: "Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech" (1988, p. 41). While this study is not intended as an autobiography in the traditional sense, nevertheless in the searching out of my question directed towards my work as a religious educator I see myself constantly interjecting with happenings from other aspects of my life all of which contribute to the resisting and embracing of what it means for me to be conscious of myself as a Christian feminist and, in turn, its affect on me as a religious educator. Likewise I wish to honor the influence of special moments in the classroom which have informed my seeing all of life in other ways.

The Interplay of the Personal and the Public

The following two events are intended to reflect the interplay of both the personal and public aspects of my life which, when woven together, contribute to the development of feminist consciousness. One aspect of this consciousness is to resist the notion of dividing the world into private and public spheres. As Kathleen Weiler notes in reflecting on the feminist focus on the importance of everyday life: "It should be clear that to argue the need to take seriously the everyday lives of women is not to accept as valid the dichotomy between private and public arenas as separate universes" (1988, p. 61).

The first event I will describe occurred in the classroom almost eight years ago. It was a time when, although I was theoretically becoming aware of feminist issues and concerns and even speaking in favor of them occasionally, inwardly I resisted much of what I thought feminism stood for. Possibly this resistance was due to certain experiences in my life which I cannot share here.

The event I do share here is one in which my resistance started to leave me as I began to see, and see painfully.

I was teaching a course in religious education and had asked the teachers to engage us in some presentation and discussion on pertinent issues for religious education. Two women chose to look at the topic of women in relationship to the church. It was a powerful engagement, one of those wonderful teaching moments when there is a sense that all are open to the experience and somewhat changed by it. I remember my old nagging feelings rising when one of the presentors suggested that women need to meet together and share their concerns in order to raise each other's consciousness regarding what Maria Harris so aptly refers to as a "deafening silence about women." I objected to their suggestion on the grounds that it was exclusive, something we criticized about men. Weren't we just promoting a situation in which, as Paulo Friere had stated, it was possible for the oppressed to become the oppressor? I received a simple response. The response was not earthshaking on the surface; however, it deeply affected me. The woman who had made the statement quietly responded that though meeting separately was not an ultimate goal nevertheless it was an important and necessary step. We as women needed time to tell our own story since it had either been told for us or had simply never been spoken or written about. From that moment I began to hear the stories of other women and eventually learned to listen to my own. I welcome this research as one more way of continuing to listen to stories and tell them.

The second event happened a few months after I had written the first story in this chapter. As part of my struggle to find myself "speaking" and being "heard" in my Church tradition I accepted membership on the Archdiocesan Women's Council whose mandate is to:

> Call forth their (women's) talents and to put them at the service of the faith community; to encourage the faith community to call forth and incorporate women's talents in the life of the community for the benefit of all (Annual Report, February, 1988).

While I question the wording of this mandate and mumble to myself, and occasionally to other members, regarding what we do or don't do as a Council, I have generally found the experience to be worthwhile. It is a valuable way to share with other women with varying feminist perspectives in a common task and in the sharing of our many stories of how we feel about ourselves as women in the Church. At these meetings the rupture I feel between myself as feminist and catholic is often forgotten - even healed for awhile. It was on my way to one of these meetings that my second event occurred.

Attempting to park my car in an overcrowded church parking lot which is usually quiet on a Monday evening I realized that the ordination of two men to the priesthood was about to take place in the church right next to the place where we women were going to meet "to call forth our talents." I tried not to think about the symbolism of the two separate gatherings; but, for better or worse, I was confronted with the symbol itself! Rounding the corner, I came face to face with a long line of men (priests) lined up two by two waiting to enter the Church and embrace two more males into their ranks.

I wanted to run away. I also felt the urge to walk past and say something negative. But I didn't. Instead I kept walking, my head up but not my heart. As I approached the line I found my eyes and my voice greeting many of them. Men I have worked with/for over the years. One smiled and asked if I was going to join them. I smiled back, resisting on the inside, smiling on the outside. "Not this year." In this greeting I felt both friend and stranger. I know some of their

questions and pain and I am a friend. Yet as a woman I cannot stand with them in their line and so I am stranger.

Hurriedly I escaped to my meeting. I found some refuge in the fact that other council members had similar feelings. Together we wondered sadly if our council meant anything to the gathered community next door. On my way home I thought of Virginia Woolf writing about her experience of standing outside the door of the Oxford Library. A door through which she was not permitted to enter because she was a woman. She wrote: "and I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse to be locked in" (1929, p. 24).

In writing about some of my own experiences of feeling locked out it is important for me to state that the two stories in this chapter relating to ordination are not intended as a wish for me to "stand in their line." Rather, they are symbolic for me of the maleness of our church present in many people, lay and clergy, women and men. This maleness is very evident in our liturgical services which are led by a male and addressed to a male God. Neither are these two church centered stories meant to exclude my struggle as a woman in my work place and society in general.

Subject with Subject Matter

This partial introducing of myself before posing my educational question is essential to this research for I am a subject inextricably bound up to my subject matter. The subject "I" is not easy to speak about. At times I would far rather escape into the more distant matter of talking about the subject matter of religious education. Like Madeleine Grumet who felt she had betrayed her child by speaking publicly about her birth to strangers in an effort to let her personal experience as a parent shed light on educational discourse, I too, suffer a similar discomfort in allowing you to know me through some of the

stories that have birthed me into a new consciousness. Yet I know these stories must be told. I find myself echoing with Grumet (1988):

> At the same time (referring to her sense of betrayal, my discomfort) I believed, and still believe, that by withholding information about that relation (hers to her children, mine to my church) from the public discourse of education we deny our own experience and our own knowledge. Our silence certifies the "system," and we become complicit with theorists and teachers who repudiate the intimacy of nurture (homes, faith traditions) in their own histories and in their work in education.
>
> So I (Madeleine, Barbara) have chosen to let my own experience surface in this text. (p. xvi)

It is now possible to share my question with you.

CHAPTER TWO

PURSUING THE QUESTION

Introduction

As I brought the reflection of my own emerging feminist consciousness to bear upon the meaning of my work as a religious educator, I began to ask myself the following question. How does my consciousness of the silence about women, or even my own silence, affect the way I prepare to teach or assist others to teach the Christian story to young people? In the Christian story I know, the naming of our God and ourselves is for the most part in text, prayer, and ordered relations experienced through a patriarchal paradigm. This paradigm is purported to be one divinely sanctioned by a male God (Ruether, 1983).

As I began to probe this question, I realized that I was not alone. For example, one woman expressed a similar struggle. As a teacher herself, and mother of two daughters, she felt torn between affirming a respect for their religious education experience both in school and church and, at the same time, rejecting much of what is offered to them in both places. She did not want to impose her own consciousness on her daughters. Neither did she want them to accept uncritically patriarchal values or end up because of them rejecting their Christian heritage. I have heard many similar struggles. It is out of the concern expressed in them, including my own, that the purpose of this study emerged. This chapter presents my question and how it was pursued. Chapter Three offers the why - why it was pursued in this manner.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to explore ways of engaging in religious education that allow, and indeed encourage, the voicing of the Christian story as fully inclusive of women. The basic question was - "What is the significance of a feminist voice for the religious educating of young people?" Directed by this question, my partner-in-conversation (choice of term explained later in this chapter) and I asked ourselves how we might go about exploring the significance of feminist voice for engaging in religious education with junior high students in a Catholic school context.

I chose junior high students for a number of reasons. Most of my own classroom experience was with junior high students and I have been a junior high religion consultant for many years. Second, I was fortunate to meet a junior high teacher who had similar concerns. Third, I believe that raising consciousness vis-a-vis women in relationship to Christian experience is essential for the spiritual growth of young people who are beginning to be sexually aware of themselves as females or as males. The major question for the study has already been stated. The following sub-questions were helpful for our search:

1. How does our emerging feminist consciousness inform our "seeing" the content and pedagogy of our teaching?
2. What gender-related attitudes do students have of themselves?
3. Are these attitudes supported and/or challenged by the contemporary approach to teaching religious education?
4. Are the students interested in the issue of women in Christian teaching and practice?
5. What will it mean to "speak" the content and manner of our teaching with a feminist voice?

These questions are posed in a personal manner in order to state that the intent of this research is not to offer a feminist theory of religious education for others to learn about. Rather, the study relates the story of how two female Catholic educators, becoming more aware of their own feminist consciousness, asked themselves what this meant for them as religious educators. The methodology of being in conversation with each other was inherently essential for this search. Hopefully, the narrative of our conversations will encourage others to contribute to the dialogue. As the feminist authors of God's Fierce Whimsy (1983) state:

> We would like to imagine that in part because we do not speak on behalf of everyone, what we say may ring true in some way to all who share this hunger for theological (religious) education. (p. 9)

The basic question for this study - What is the significance of feminist voice for the religious educating of young people? - was explored by the interaction of three sources: (1) insights from feminist theology and feminist education, (2) dialogue on our personal histories, and (3) listening to the experiences of the adolescents. These three, together, formed our approach to engaging in religious education. The reference to engagement here is not just to the content of the religion program; it also includes the way in which we teach. We hoped our teaching would allow the students to be treated as subjects interrelating with themselves, their world, and their God. As Maria Harris (1987) so poignantly expresses:

> We misunderstand what it is to be a teacher if we think that teaching simply means to hand over, or convey subject matter merely as a system of clues. Actually, teaching is far more. Teaching is the creation of a situation in which subjects, human subjects are handed over to themselves. (p. 33)

There is a fundamental recognition in the above statement that is inherent to this study. Education is never a neutral act. What we teach or do not teach and how we teach it offers powerful value messages to our students (Friere, 1970; Heubner, 1966; Eisner, 1979; Schneidewind, 1983). Before presenting the methodology, the way in which this study was carried out, it is important to state some basic attitudes that we (I and the teacher I worked with) had towards our "subjects," the adolescents with whom we engaged in the important work of religious education. They can too easily get lost in the "subject-matter" of the study rather than remain as "subjects who matter" (Harris, 1987).

View of Adolescents

Many times in this study the adolescents had an opportunity to speak for themselves. Furthermore our reflections also offer a portrait of these young people. Consequently I only wish to state briefly four points that guided us in seeking to understand how adolescents view themselves. How they view themselves, rather than how they are viewed by others, is an essential principle for this study which argues for the validity of self perspective.

Point one: several times during the study, comments that students made led us to conclude that they felt they were generally regarded negatively by adults. For example, once I asked them how they would expect adults to describe them. They immediately offered negative descriptions such as "nerd" or "irresponsible." On other occasions they indicated that they felt prejudiced against, in school and the work place, just because they were teenagers. It was important to remember during this study that their immediate sense of exclusion was expressed from the perspective of their age irrespective of whether they were females or males. It wasn't often that girls zeroed in on gender exclusion

or gender inferiority unless we as teachers engaged in some consciousness raising around a particular topic. This last statement is not intended to indicate that girls were not aware of attitudes like gender exclusion or inferiority. The statement means that they did not generally voice this awareness on their own initiative. I believe that some of the themes that emerged out of this study would indicate that they did have some awareness in this area.

Point two: I relied on the attitude of the teacher in trying, as it were, to see these young people from her perspective. This was important since I had not taught junior high for a number of years. I can only describe her attitude as one of respect and understanding. She seemed to accept them for who they were. When there were occasions of bad behavior, she would scold the individuals involved, but at the same time would also offer excuses for them saying that it was probably just a bad day for them. Many times when I asked her about the responses of the students she would give reasons which, I discovered later, would mirror the reasons the young people would give in response to a similar question. I tried to listen to the "praxis" of the teacher with regard to her experience of these theories.

At the same time I did not ignore other theoretical positions about teenagers emerging from other people's research. For example, Bibby and Posterski (1985), in their study of Canadian teenagers, point out that teenagers are not a culture unto themselves. Rather, the authors state that their "survey has found that those terminal and instrumental values deemed most important by adult Canadians are also held by a solid majority of young people" (p. 24). This reflection of adult values was very evident in many of the responses given concerning notions of feminism.

A final point regarding the faith stance of the adolescents involved in this study needs to be made. In no way did I intend to judge the personal sense of

faith or the decisions that these young people make with respect to their relationships with each other. The majority of these young people did not attend church, which is a reflection of the majority of our students in this school district. This fact causes some difficult questions to be raised by those who teach religious education in our Catholic schools. It was also a fact I had to consider carefully. Both the teacher and I are involved with our church and our questions about feminism are strongly related to our experience of liturgical celebrations. This was not true for the young people and it meant that some topics which I hoped would emerge, such as women priests, were not given much significance by the students.

How the Question Was Pursued

The Teacher as Partner-in-Conversation

My reference to the teacher I worked with as a partner-in-conversation provided me with a guiding metaphor for engaging in this research, both as to whom I approached and to the manner of proceeding with the study. The phrase, partner-in-conversation, is mine. However, I was inspired to use the metaphor of conversation by reading Jane Roland Martin's book Reclaiming Conversation (1985). Martin discusses the work of prominent female writers on education, Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Beecher, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman who in their writings reacted to a number of presuppositions regarding female education in the writings of Plato and Rousseau. She encourages her readers to engage in a conversation about education by reclaiming the voices of these women in order to decide what is appropriate for the education of both men and women in our own day. Similarly, the teacher and I conversed together about our religious tradition. In so doing, we sought to find a voice in our teaching regarding the place of women including our own in that tradition.

As the beginning of the study I chose to look for a female teacher who had a similar story to my own. Since I have shared some aspects of my own life in Chapter One it is only appropriate to invite Maria to use her own voice to situate herself at the beginning of this research. She states:

God walked through my childhood often. A childhood filled with loving, supportive parents, correspondence religion lessons, summer camps run by the parish, priests as frequent visitors in our home, and a mother very actively involved in the parish from the Sunday flowers to the cleaning of the pews. I can recall once when we were young, arrogant children we accused Mama of being 'used' by the parish and she in turn stated simply "why do you think I am doing this? Not for them - I do it for God."

And so God danced through all aspects of my life. Ah, but Sunday - what a special day. A day for dressing up, walking to church for Mass, and then coming home to a lovely dinner, often in the company of a priest. Sunday: a family day when warmth, safety and permanence abounded.

Leaving home for University and then life as a teacher resulted in an attempt to keep those childhood patterns in place. Mass had always been enjoyable, so why did I no longer feel fulfilled, as before? Perhaps some involvement would help: so I became a lector and part-time banner committee member. I also became an inactive card carrying CWL (Catholic Women's League) member for several years; the activities never appealed and I always had some excuse to never get involved otherwise. Getting involved gave some satisfaction - but the huge parish I belonged to had great difficulty fostering a feeling of closeness. Whole families that were catered to constantly in the homily and parish activities were lost in this parish - never mind a young, single elementary school teacher.

At this point I studied theology for a year and then began teaching junior high. Very dissatisfied but not able to articulate why, I began looking for another smaller parish. For a short while I attended one, but those same feelings of dissatisfaction arose. I attended my home parish sporadically for several months and then decided to return to it on a regular basis. I returned with much anger, but still unable to pinpoint "why" beyond the attempt of living out my faith as a single

individual in a family-oriented parish. The exploration of my anger was essential not to my deep, joyous faith in God - this I had never questioned; rather it was essential to my continuation in the Catholic church. At this time, Barbara walked into my classroom (typed from a handwritten copy).

I found it fascinating to read in Maria's reflections threads of my own background, although I did not grow up in such a friendly family environment. Like Maria, I never questioned a church, which I loved deeply, till I was an adult. My sense of belonging to the church in early adult life was probably even more secure than Maria's since as a member of a religious community I was more "acceptable" on the hierarchical scale than a "single elementary school teacher" (Maria's words). The uneasiness associated with beginning to feel a stranger in the church also began as new vistas were opened to me through theological studies and especially when certain women began to walk into my life.

As noted earlier, I felt very fortunate to have discovered that Maria was experiencing similar feelings and asking the same questions as myself regarding ourselves as women. I had known Maria for several years as a professional colleague as well as socially through a mutual acquaintance. A chance conversation, in which we shared some of our concerns, led me to invite her to be my partner-in-conversation for this study.

My major criterion for inviting her as partner was that we could begin with a common concern based on a sense of ourselves as "other," inferior or absent other, in our Catholic tradition. We could also be partners-in-conversation by being grounded not only in a sense of ourselves as "other" but also in a shared belief in our own abilities as educators to actively engage, albeit in a limited manner, in the task of working for change within our religious traditions. Working for change is an important component of feminist methodology. We begin with a contradictory sense of ourselves as "other" yet, we are also

conscious of ourselves as acting beings at the same time (Smith, 1979). Both aspects were present as we took our questions into the everyday reality of a religious education classroom.

Given a few glimpses of our personal backgrounds it is evident that our experience of being "other" is not exactly the same. While this statement might appear fairly obvious, it is made in the light of Gerda Lerner's caution against using oppression as a universal category for describing the situation of women historically, thereby ignoring such essential factors as race and social class which add further oppressive elements and often divide women from each other (Lerner,1979).

This teacher and I share a common background in being white, middle class, and Canadian. Nevertheless, our ethnic roots, our family, work, and parish experiences are quite different. All these, including an age and lifestyle difference, affect the way we understand ourselves in our church. This statement regarding our unique perspectives was made primarily as an advisement to myself, the one who initiated the conversation, several times during the study. It was made as a caution to myself not to impose my reactions or conclusions on her.

The Manner of our Conversations

At the outset we made an agreement that the manner of our conversations would occur in the following ways:

Participation with her and her students in the grade nine religion class. I was involved with one of Maria's grade nine religion classes in which there were twelve girls and eleven boys. I visited her class on an average of twice a week, with the exception of holiday time, from September 1989 - May 1990. The religion periods were generally forty-five minutes long. In the early part of

the 1989 year I also visited her previous grade nine religion class a number of times in order to have a sense of what direction I might take. The themes from this study are based largely on the September 1989 - May 1990 experience. My conversations with Maria continued till June 1991.

At my first visit Maria introduced me to the students and invited me to give a reason for being there. The students were seated at long rectangular tables in a large square. Maria had arranged the room this way so that they could all see each other face to face. I explained to the students that I often thought about what it meant to be a woman in the church. I knew their teacher was going to involve them in some topics relating to this area and I was interested in their reactions. Maria checked with the students in my absence to see if they resented my intrusion into their religion class and if they minded giving me some of their written work. I always felt warmly welcomed and accepted.

Participation generally involved my being present in the classroom. I sat in the square with the students. Maria often walked around when she was speaking to the class. While I was there, I took a few notes and also participated with the students in whatever they were asked to do by the teacher. At times I was more actively engaged in asking questions, and also took some involvement in class presentations. A more active involvement occurred later on in the study especially when the students produced a video program on the Gospel story of the woman taken in adultery. I was also grateful that the students were very willing and generous in giving me some of their written responses from time to time. In addition I taped a few sessions with them towards the end of the study. Maria and I both agreed that the inclusion of student voices was a necessary and ethical part of this research. It was important to be sensitive to what their questions were with regard to women in

the church. Their questions and statements sensitized us with respect to the appropriateness of raising certain topics with them.

Meeting with the teacher outside of the class. Maria and I met on a number of occasions outside of the class time. We did this for two reasons. One was to share my field notes on the classroom experience. As I shared my field notes, we also took time to discuss Maria's own observations. Later, Maria contributed her reactions to my written themes. These conversations helped me to clarify what was going on in the classroom as well as searching for new ways to reflect on the question for this study.

The second reason was equally significant. I was fortunate to find in Maria a teacher engaged in taking theology courses as well as teaching religion in a Catholic school to grade nine students. While she did not continue with formal courses during the length of this study, she took time to read some of the background readings from feminist theology and feminist education that informed my own insights for this study. She also made suggestions to me concerning her own personal reading in the area of feminism. Thus we were often able to converse about some of the more theoretical underpinnings of this project as well as the practical life of the classroom experiences. Even in methodologies, such as Action Research (referred to in Chapter Three) that begin with the questions of the practitioners, critics state that there still remains a distance between the lived reality of these questions and the "theoretical" praxis stance of the research method (Smits, 1987). One possible reason for this distance is that teachers do not have time to consider the philosophical nature of their questions. Therefore it is difficult for the researcher to engage in a truly collaborative conversation with the practitioner even if it is agreed that they have engaged in a collaborative action around a common question, concern, or issue. By reading some of the feminist literature I hoped that the

teacher would be more able to sense herself as a partner in a common project (see Chapter Ten for her reflections).

Collecting data from the conversations. Each of the ways described above offered me an opportunity for rich conversations with the teacher and students. These conversations lead to some important insights with respect to the significance of a feminist voice for the religious educating of adolescents. The data from these conversations was collected in the following manner:

1) I kept a personal journal of my own insights as I considered the experience of partnering with this teacher as well as my continuing experience of myself within my religious tradition. While I did not follow in detail the Intensive Journal Process for writing, this process was helpful for writing and learning to value my own experiences. As Progroff states: "We do not analyze our life as though we were an outsider to it. But we enter the inner movement of our whole life history and connect ourselves to it from within" (Progroff, 1975, p. 13). Significantly, journal writing in the form of diaries has been a way for women, excluded from historical texts, to write about their lives (Lerner, 1979).

2) I kept field notes that recorded my own observations of the classroom experiences as well as tape recordings of our shared discussion in relation to the two reasons stated above. Generally our conversations were informal. Since we were both intent on the topic, I did not see the necessity for guiding the conversation as in a formal interview structure. However, since I obviously "saw" things that Maria did not "see", and vice versa, I was explicitly directive in my questioning when I was seeking to understand a particular observation of my own. I was guided in this manner of conversing by Ann Oakely who has written about her experience of interviewing women in Doing Feminist Research (1981).

A more detailed rationale for my research methodology is provided in the next chapter which places my methodology and the question of its validity in a feminist context.

Delimitations

The scope of this study was delimited to the classroom of one female teacher teaching junior high religious education to grade nine students in a schooling context. Religious education must therefore be understood in its more narrow sense of teaching the subject of religious education in a formal school setting. It is important to note that the content of the religious education classes was not derived from a prescribed religious education text since the teacher chose to develop various topics which she felt were more appropriate for her students' backgrounds and interest. This approach did not attend to the significance of a feminist voice for a broader view of religious education understood as encompassing the total life of the school based on Catholic philosophy as well as extending beyond the confines of the school.

As a justification for this single classroom approach, I would point out that the study was centered on a question directly related to teaching. Therefore the study required concentrated attention on the teaching activity given the time restrictions for the research. Furthermore, the sensitivity of this question, given varied reactions to the whole issue of feminism, led me to first seek to explore my question with someone who would share my concerns. Otherwise I could perhaps have imposed my perspectives on those who would be threatened by them. Hopefully, our collaborative research in this study has shown both the teacher and myself how to share concerns and insights with others.

While this study will no doubt challenge existing social arrangements in our church and society in general, I hope that the tone of this written document respects the personal stance of others and their consciousness in this area. I am very well aware of the fact that for most of my teaching career I was quite oblivious to the importance of a feminist perspective. I attribute my growth in "seeing" to gentle voices rather than strident ones. For this reason I delimited the study to working with one female teacher who shared my common concern and her students who were willing to accept my presence and topic.

Limitations

There are two major limitations to the study. One is that both of us are Catholic (Latin rite). Therefore our perception of ourselves in relationship to our church is seen through that tradition and its present teachings and practice with respect to women. Women in other Christian traditions (and other religions) will no doubt have a somewhat different story to relate. It is important to state that our perception is not a uniform one held by all women in our own tradition.

A second limitation is that I chose, for the reason stated in the delimitation section, to work with a woman who had a similar story to my own. I did not have the opportunity to consider how the significance of a feminist voice for the religious educating of young adolescents might be explored through conversation with a male (who may or may not be aware of the issue) or with a female who would not relate to my concerns. I do hope, however, that insights from this research indicate ways to continue dialogue on this important educational question with other women and men.

Definition of Terms

Partner-in-conversation

I find the phrase, partner-in-conversation, an appropriate way to refer to the teacher I invited to work with me. We shared a common experience and are both interested in the inclusion of feminist issues within religious education. Furthermore, the term indicates my intent to make this research as collaborative as possible although I realize that we did not have equal responsibilities for this project.

Religious Education

The broadest definition of religious education includes all those learning experiences provided within a religious tradition for its members (Moran, 1979). In the Catholic school context religious education is used to denote those activities (studies, retreats, service projects, policies, etc.) which support a Catholic philosophy of the school. It is also used in a strict sense to refer to the religious education program taught as a subject. It is this latter sense that I am referring to in my study, although I believe the implications of the study point to guidelines beyond the classroom.

Religious Educating

In an effort to show that the study is concerned not just with topics in themselves, but the way in which they are taught, I sometimes use the phrase Religious Educating, which is my own, to emphasize the process of teaching.

Story

Groome (1980) uses the term in two ways. One way is in reference to the Christian Story (capital S) meaning "the whole faith tradition of our people however that is expressed or embodied" (p. 192). A second way is with respect to each one's personal story as to how they understand and embody the Christian way of life. I use story in both these ways.

CHAPTER THREE

SITUATING MY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter Two I described the method used in this study. My research question considers the effect of a feminist perspective on the teaching of religious education. It is important to me that the methodology used to address this question is also framed within a feminist context. The intent of this chapter is to discuss the nature of feminist research and to reflect through examples taken from my study how I attempted to be faithful to my question by the way it was pursued.

Two important aspects must be considered in relation to the notion of feminist research. The first aspect considers feminist understandings about what actually constitutes feminist research. The second aspect involves relating these understandings to current educational research paradigms rooted in three major philosophical traditions: logical positivism, hermeneutics, and critical social theory.

The Question of Feminist Method

Is there such a thing as a distinctive feminist method? Sandra Harding (1987) points out that the response is complex. The complexity lies in the fact that discussions concerning method generally intertwine three dimensions of research: the data gathering techniques, the research paradigm, as well as issues relating to how knowledge is appropriated. For this reason she states: "It is not at all clear what one is supposed to be looking for when trying to

identify a distinctive feminist method of research" (1987, p. 2). Harding's conclusion, like that of other feminist theorists (Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1989; Weiler, 1988), is that the distinctiveness of feminist inquiry is not to be discovered in which techniques are used or even in which research paradigms are employed. Rather, the distinctiveness lies in certain "methodological features" which "have consequences for the selection of research methods" (Harding, 1987, p. 6). As Du Bois (1989) states:

> But I do not in fact hold that there is or ought to be a distinctively feminist scientific method. I do believe that feminism empowers and requires us to think very differently about the purposes and methods of social science than we have been able to do within the confines of hegemony of androcentric science and worldview. (p. 109)

The fundamental response to the question of a distinctive feminist approach is to ask another question: Is the approach to research consistent with feminist principles? (Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1989).

Principles of Feminist Research

Joan Acker (1983) speaks of the need for a "radical rebeginning" in feminist research. Researchers must begin by "understanding gender as central in constructing all social relations and taking individual women's lives as a problematic" (p. 424). She points out that this "rebeginning" offers a radical critique of other forms of research which either ignore the reality of women's experiences or assumes a gendered definition of women consistent with theories of male dominance (Smith, 1979; Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1989). As Du Bois (1989) so appropriately remarks, "social science has looked at - and not seen - women" (p. 108). The central agenda then for feminist research is to recognize that

> in this silence and invisibility is to be found
> the reality of women, of our lives, our experience,
> our vision - and the potential for new understandings
> and construction of ourselves and our world. (p. 108)

I read this quotation several months after I had formulated the title for this study which begins with the phrase "Out of silence." This phrase resonates with my own intuition at the time that the silence itself embodied an unnamed way of speaking that was emerging into a "voice" wanting to be heard, first by itself and later by others. Learning to speak out of the silence became central to the direction of this study.

While there is much diversity and debate among feminist researchers regarding appropriate ways to engage in research, Kathleen Weiler (1988) suggests that there are three major themes inherent to feminist methodology which cut across diverse feminist positions: (1) that the investigation begins with "a grounded position in their own subjective oppression" (p. 58), (2) that there is a political significance to the personal experiences of everyday life, and (3) that there is a firm conviction to "changing the position of women and therefore to changing society" (p. 59). I will briefly discuss these three ways in light of their influence in the shaping of my own study.

In Chapter Four I explore in more detail what it means to speak of women's oppression. Beginning the research from the "grounded position" of one's own "subjective oppression" implies that the researcher herself becomes fully visible and integral to what kind of research is undertaken and the way it is carried out. As Maria Mies (1989) states: "feminist women must deliberately and courageously integrate . . . their own experience of oppression and discrimination into the research process" (p. 121). This approach is in contra distinction to traditional, androcentric forms of research which require an

absence of the researcher's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs towards their research topic (Acker, Barry and Essevald, 1983; Harding, 1987).

This beginning point for research relates very much to the context in which my own question was first formed. I hope I have made this point evident in the glimpses of my own story as I related it in Chapter One. This same beginning point also relates to the choice I made in inviting a woman who herself feels a similar sense of oppression to share my question with me.

With respect to the second theme, that of recognizing the political significance of everyday life experiences, Acker et al. (1983) states: "What is at issue is not just everyday experience but the relations which underlie it and the connections between the two" (p. 425). In a similar vein Dorothy Smith (1979) speaks of the "problematic of the everyday world." A number of significant issues relate to these two statements. Primarily these statements reflect the belief that the reality of women's experiences viewed from their perspectives is worthy of being researched, a fact that has been ignored in traditional social research. As Harding (1987) states:

> While studying women is not new, studying them
> from the perspective of their own experiences so
> that women can understand themselves and the world
> can claim virtually no history at all. (p. 8)

Again, what is meant by speaking of women's experiences is explored further in the next chapter. For feminists engaged in research, it is significant that honoring "the standpoint of women" (Smith, 1979) means that the research process must emanate from the belief that knowledge is both created and reinterpreted through dialogic reflection about the meaning of the conditions in which women find themselves. This dialogic reflection calls for a way of understanding the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both can be regarded as active subjects engaged in the process of

contributing to the meaning of the questions being studied (Lather, 1986; Weiler, 1988).

Learning to engage in this kind of relationship has been an important but not always easy part of the process of this study. Naming the teacher as my partner-in-conversation signifies my own belief in the value of her voice as well as my own in engaging in a process which could be described as an attempt at "collaborative theorizing" (Lather, 1986). Lather in her discussion of the need for reciprocity between all those who participate in the research project refers, in her article "Research as Praxis" (1986), to the work of Kusher and Norris (1980-81). She states:

> The goal of their research was to move people from articulating what they know to theorizing about what they know, a process the researchers term "collaborative theorizing." (p. 264)

Meeting with the teacher outside of class to discuss not only the classroom experience but also to bring our personal lives and readings into conversation with the experience of the classroom was an important way for us to come to know the significance of a shared question.

Two concerns remain with me with regard to this shared process. Feminist researchers emphasize that this collaborative way of doing research should engage the participants in the total methodology which means being involved in writing up at least the first draft report. In the interests of time and the nature of the thesis responsibilities this was not possible although Maria does speak for herself many times in this document. Nevertheless, I am aware of what Acker et al. (1983) refers to as an "an on-going contradiction" posed by the fact that I as writer have objectified the teacher and the students by being the one to write <u>about</u> them. I hope that the style of my writing, particularly the centralizing of stories, has to a large degree offset this objectification.

The second concern is about the adolescents who became involved in the study simply because they were taking religious education with my research partner. In what sense could or did they view themselves as subjects in this research project? Again, I can only hope that this study reflects the fact that, while caught in the situation of 'having to be there', the adolescents, both females and males, who were exposed to this research experience did find the approach we used liberating, an important principle for feminist methodology. As Acker et al. (1983) states:

> Recognizing the objects of research as subjects in their own right suggests that researchers must take care not to make the research relationship an exploitative one. (p. 425)

The question of a liberating method leads to the third aspect of feminist methodology, the conviction that feminist research must be directed towards "changing the position of women and therefore to changing society" (Weiler, 1988, p. 59). An important distinction that feminist researchers make about working for change is that the research must be "for" women rather than "on" women (Spender, 1980; Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1989). As a consequence feminist studies have generally been done by women researchers with women as subjects.

I was concerned that there were both boys and girls in the classroom. Could the boys see the possibility of liberating change for them when the direction of the study was focused on raising consciousness regarding the way females are imaged and treated in a patriarchal society? A helpful point is made by Harding (1987) when she states that "It is falsely imagined that men cannot make important contributions to feminist research and scholarship" (p. 10). She contends that men can make important and distinctive contributions to feminist research by engaging in "self-critical research"

regarding the way men have been gendered to think and act towards women. She also wisely points out that it is inappropriate to both criticize male scholars "for ignoring women and gender and also to insist that they are incapable of conducting research which satisfy feminist requirements" (p. 12).

I have applied Harding's ideas to the value of having both males and females participate in this study. I also cannot see the possibility of real change for women coming about in society, or in our church, until there is a cooperative effort on the part of all to work for the dignity of each person.

A final comment I wish to make about working for change as integral to feminist research is that the intent of this study was not to engage ourselves as teachers or the students in any earth-shaking project that would directly challenge present structural ways of thinking and acting either in the school or our church. The basic intent was (for the teacher and myself) to first understand the change in consciousness within ourselves and its significance for our teaching religious education. A related intent was to raise consciousness among the students. We hoped that this consciousness raising would be a first step towards encouraging students to be change agents themselves in relation to their own questions and situations which differ from ours.

These related "first step" intents reflect Du Bois' (1989) perceptive statement that feminist scholarship is in its early stages "and in this early work we must first learn to see. To see what is there; not what we have been taught is there" (p. 109). In learning to see I believe that each one involved in this study had an opportunity to begin to engage in what Du Bois refers to as "the first order of interpretation in science - the naming of the question, the naming of one's own observations" (p. 108).

The Relationship of Feminist Research to Current Research Paradigms

In what way can feminist research be related to current research paradigms grounded in the three philosophical traditions referred to in the beginning of this discussion? Specifically, do any of these three paradigms resonate with the "methodological features" described in the above section? I believe that feminist inquiry is most at home with a blending of the hermeneutical and critical social theories which lead to what is generally referred to as qualitative approaches to research. However, it is important to consider whether or not the quantitative approach to research emanating from logical positivism is entirely dismissed by feminists.

In Chapter One I referred to a major criticism directed against the strict empirical approach by discussing the notion of "bias" and "conscious partiality." Likewise, the idea of a reciprocal relationship between the woman researcher and the woman as subject does not fit with the emphasis on "objectivity" which is a main feature of this approach. Furthermore, as Harding (1987) notes, the emphasis on women's experiences, "in the plural," which take into account race, class, and culture discounts the empirical notion of a universal (normative "man". This implies that

> once we realized that there is no universal man but only culturally different men and women, then "man's" eternal companion - "woman" also disappeared. (p. 27)

While there seems to be a fairly overall rejection of the strict empirical approach among feminists, in fairness it is important to make two points. First, there is a growing conviction in the traditional scientific domain that it is not possible to do value free research. A significant influence has been the work of Thomas Kuhn (1970) who showed that scientific knowledge is to a large extent

dependent on the concerns of the scientific community which produces that knowledge. The notion of "value-free" research is generally discredited today.

A second point is one made by feminist researcher, Toby Epstein Jayaratne (1989). While admitting and seriously criticizing major flaws in the quantitative approach, nevertheless she points out that this approach can be both useful and politically significant for women providing they undertake to reform it for their use. She states:

> There must be appropriate quantitative evidence to counter the pervasive and influential quantitative sexist research which has and continues to be generated in the social sciences. Feminist researchers can best accomplish this. If some of the traditional procedures used to provide that needed evidence are contrary to our feminist values, then we must change those procedures accordingly. (p. 159)

Related to her approach Jayartne makes an important statement about objectivity. She distinguishes between "objectivity in the research process and objectivity as a part of the analysis of data" (p. 154). While the process is influenced, and rightly so, by our personal biases based on feminist principles, at the same time the objective, procedural methods for gathering and analyzing data can be helpful towards ensuring that the "final product can be less subject to those biases" (p. 154).

This notion of objectivity was an important one for me in valuing the significance of the voices of others in both how the process developed and the way it was interpreted. Furthermore, while my study cannot be located within the quantitative approach to research, it was important to consider some quantitative data in terms of the separation and numeration of various responses given by the females and males in the classroom.

While a number of methodological approaches to research are rooted in the hermeneutical tradition, for the sake of brevity I will direct my remarks

towards the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach can be linked with the interests of feminist researchers in its efforts to recover the nature of lived experience through description and interpretation (Van Manen, 1984). As Vangie Bergum (1989) states in relation to the work of Van Manen:

> Hermeneutics . . . is concerned with bringing to language that which lies hidden. This is done by an attentiveness to the ground from which description comes in order to reveal the possibilities of deeper understanding. (p. 41)

Educators using the phenomenological approach seek to explore the "life-world" of the child, the teacher, and the classroom as an a priori condition for educational theorizing. The strength of this approach is that it recognizes that too often theory about education has been abstracted from the praxis of the classroom. The result is that actual classroom life appears to have no value. This approach is not unlike the feminist critique that major theoretical discourse about human beings in the world has ignored the value of what women were doing (Lerner, 1979: O'Brien, 1981).

However, the weakness of the phenomenological approach, from the feminist perspective, is that inevitably the interpretation of what <u>is</u> depends on the self-understanding of the one who does the interpreting. Since the majority of females have, till now, been "conscientized" (Friere, 1970) into understanding themselves within male-defined terms, it is inevitable that interpretations of a particular situation will not necessarily yield a self-defined view of women's perceptions. At this junction phenomenologists and feminists part company. Madeleine Grumet (1988) points out that feminists object to the apolitical stance of phenomenologists and their "refusal to acknowledge desire in the constitutions of knowledge, communication and gender" (p. 65). Likewise, phenomenologists criticize feminists for "imposing a political and

psychoanalytic determinism on the accounts of 'things in themselves'" (p. 65). As Grumet states, both positions have much to learn from each other.

Grumet's caution as well as my own concern with the interpretation of the classroom experience influenced me to ask the teacher to engage in reading and discussing some of the feminist literature that supports this study. These readings assisted the teacher and me to gain insight into our own conversations regarding a feminist voice for religious education in a way that I do not believe would have been possible if we had continued to understand the experience in itself. Dorothy Smith (1979) states that while the visibility of women's experiences provides the starting point, the determinants of those experiences "are shaped and determined by relation and forces external to them" (p. 110). Often our feminist reading helped us to see and name what was there as we participated in what Du Bois (1989) refers to as "an archaeological endeavor - that of discovering and uncovering the actual facts of women's lives and experiences" (p. 109).

Critical social theory highlights the quest for emancipatory knowledge and resonates with the feminist concern for commitment to action as integral to the research process. This quest entails a consideration of whose interests are being served in the knowledge that is valued (Habermas, 1971). Thomas Groome, a religious educator who bases his work partly on Habermas, states that we need to ask what aspects of our tradition are being intentionally recalled or omitted: "Will it (tradition) be used to legitimize present social arrangements or to call them into question" (1980, p. 16).

The distinctive question that feminist researchers address to social arrangements asks how gender has been constructed to favor male superiority and normativeness. The absence of gender as an issue in critical social theory has been duly noted by many feminist theorists (O'Brien, 1981; Acker, 1987;

Weedon, 1987). In this study gender is an issue in both the attempt to note how adolescents in this situation understand their "femaleness", or their "maleness", as well as asking whether the knowledge that is shared concerning the Christian story is emancipatory for them.

A further issue with respect to critical social theory is that of consciousness or, in Frierean terms, "conscientization." It is in the realization that one is oppressed that strategies for liberation begin to take shape (Friere, 1970). I have already noted in the discussion on phenomenology that it is not easy for women who have been socialized in a male-defined world to step out of it and be critical. At times, the lack of critical awareness on the part of the female adolescents as well as the related question of how much we as teachers should encourage them to "see," especially with respect to our religious tradition, was a difficult issue for the teacher and me to deal with.

With respect to a particular methodology related to critical social theory I found insights from the Action Research approach very beneficial for this study. The goal of Action Research is "to improve and understand the world by changing it" (Kemmis and McTaggert, 1988, p. 5). This goal is not only consistent with the goal of feminist research, but it is also the process which emphasizes the importance of collaboration around a shared experiential question.

As a concluding statement with respect to the relationship between a feminist approach to research and the three paradigms referred to above, it is important to reiterate that the features of feminist methodology described by Weiler (1988) offer a guideline for whatever paradigm or related technique is either used or avoided. As Bowles and Duelli-Klein (1989) state:

> feminist research is not (and hopefully never will be) trapped in a set of rigidly fixed rules the way

> much of traditional research is. We should be free to combine whatever parts of whatever methods we think are promising for our research goals. (p. 96)

I would hope that this study, which borrows from a blending of approaches rooted in hermeneutic and critical social theory, can be best judged for its authenticity in terms of its adherence to directions proposed by feminist theorists.

Issues of Validity

Feminist researchers borrow from various recognized ways of establishing validity for their work, providing they are consistent with the approach described in this chapter. An important insight about validity consistent with a feminist approach is one offered by Cronbach (1980). He states: "To call for value-free standards of validity is a contradiction in terms, a nostalgic longing for a world that never was" (quoted in Lather, 1986, p. 270). Recognizing the value of this insight for assessing emancipatory research, Lather (1986) comments that "our best tactic at present is to construct research designs that demand a vigorous self-reflexivity" (p. 270). As one of the major ways to practice "self-reflexivity" as applied to research validity she reconceptualizes the techniques of triangulation, reflexivity, and member checks that Guba and Lincoln (referred to in Lather, 1986) offer as essential for assessing qualitative research. I relied on Lather's reconceptualization of some of these techniques as a guide for the validity of my own study.

With respect to triangulation which calls for multiple methods of data collection as a way of cross checking perceptions, Lather (1986) states that the "research must consciously utilize designs that allow counterpatterns as well as convergence if data are to be credible" (p. 270). Counterpatterns are essential for research that begins with and includes the researcher's perspective, which

is true for this study. Otherwise there is the danger of allowing the researcher's perspective to dominate the manner of data gathering and particularly the thematic concerns present in the written report.

One counterpattern present in this study was the caution exercised by the teacher and myself not to impose our adult concerns about feminism on the adolescents. As a result of this caution, for example, I have no idea how female adolescents feel about an all male clergy. I originally hoped that this topic would be a major part of this study. Another counterpattern is present in taking care, as much as possible, not to interfere in the teacher's choice of curriculum material. However, we did do some mutual planning together with respect to the teaching of the Scripture stories and the production of the videotape. Originally I had hoped to include a critique of the present grade nine religious education guide, Journeys; but this did not happen, since it was not used very much.

Related to this notion of convergence and counterpatterns is that of "member checks." This technique consists of checking with all research participants to see if they recognize themselves in the interpreted description. In this study, periodic checks were made with the teacher in terms of my observation of the classroom experience. She also read each of my themes and contributed, as can be noted in these themes, her own beliefs and reactions to them. In a more limited manner I also checked the "truth" of my interpretations with the students by reporting to them what I had heard and noting their reactions. However, I was often aware of Lather's caution that "the possibility of encountering false consciousness, however, creates a limit on the usefulness of member checks" (1986, p. 271). Likewise Bowles and Duelli-Klein (1989) refer to the phenomenon of "faking." Faking implies that, either consciously or unconsciously, socially desirable responses are often given in

place of what the person could "really" be saying. Rather than trying to eliminate 'faking' "by using 'tricks' when asking questions," they believe that, "feminists should consider acknowledging and incorporating faking into our research methods" (p. 91).

In this study, I recognize two possibilities of faking. One is that students are socialized into giving the teacher the "correct," meaning the socially acceptable, answer especially in terms of value loaded questions. Second, it is quite possible that in a co-ed situation girls and boys felt compelled to express themselves in a peer acceptable manner. These two facts simply have to be recognized and accepted. However, I feel rather strongly that the atmosphere in the classroom reflected a good relationship between the teacher and the students. The classroom was one of trust and free expression. It provided an opportunity for students to say what they were honestly thinking at the time. As they began to see me as more involved in their experience, especially in our day together at the studio taping their videoprogram, I felt that their responses to me, both written and oral, were again more likely to be authentic. The fact that the teacher and I often took time to let them know that their responses were essential for the final written report was also significant. Furthermore, I assured the teacher and the students of the anonymity of their responses.

Finally, Lather also argues for the inclusion of catalytic validity proposed by Reason and Rowan (referred to in Lather, 1986). Here the research is judged as to "the degree to which the research process orients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (Lather, 1986, p. 272). Obviously I cannot state whether the students have been affected by the topic of feminism on a long term basis. What I can say, in accord with the teacher's observation and some of the students' written comments, is that both females and males became conscious of gender as an issue in

describing their reality. It was, to quote Dubois (1989) once again, "a first step." I can only hope that feminism has had, and will continue to have, some positive effects in the living out of this reality in the students' progression from adolescence to adulthood. I do know that the teacher and I have been changed. In sharing this study, we have both become more aware of the implications of feminism for sharing the Christian story not only with respect to our teaching but also to the expression of our Christian faith in other dimensions of our lives. As part of that change, we were encouraged through this project to begin to see the necessity of sharing our story with others.

In conclusion, I believe that the validity or "truth" of this study should rest on the fact that it simply relates the story of two teachers asking themselves a heartfelt question. The study is valid in the sense that it relates in as honest a manner as possible our experience of that question. It is left to the readers of this study to judge if it is also true for them in the sense of what Kidder (1982) refers to as the "click of recognition", "the yes of course", "the yes but experience" (quoted in Lather, 1986, p. 271).

CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNIFICANCE OF FEMINIST VOICE

Introduction

> "When you say Man," said Oedipus, "You include women too.
> Everyone knows that." She said, "That's what you think."
> (Rukeyser, 1978)

The resources for a study on the significance of feminist voice for engaging in religious education require some clarification about the contemporary emergence of feminist consciousness and its influence on the sister areas of theology and education. Both areas, interrelating with one another, contribute in large measure to our current approach to religious education. In this chapter I will consider several ways that feminist voice is being spoken in theology and education. Before doing so it is important to ground this consideration within a general understanding of feminist consciousness emerging out of contemporary writings of feminist theory.

Theory/Conversation

It is no simple matter to discuss feminist consciousness. To do so is to theorize about it and thus abstract it from the life of women. I fear this same abstraction in writing about feminist voice in this chapter. My worse fear is that I will leave my own voice and my own personal experience behind. For this reason, as well as the fact that until recently theory of any kind has not included women, postmodern feminists particularly reject the whole notion of theory "as yet another instantiation of "phallocentric" thought (Tong, 1988, p. 7). Still the majority of feminist writers today recognize the importance of theorizing about

their experiences as a way of conversing with and eventually changing theories concerning the nature of man which presume to be inclusive of all humans. An excellent example of this conversation can be found in Mary O'Brien's book The Politics of Reproduction (1981). She criticizes the Marxist analysis of the value of persons in terms of their economic worth as laborers. She points out that Marx excluded the family experiences of women by failing to offer any analysis of reproductive labour. Her philosophy of birth is intended to counteract this absence.

Feminist theory can be understood as referring to "perspectives which guide one's search for answers to a central set of questions and dilemmas about sex and gender" (Acker, 1987, p. 421). These questions and answers are discovered myriadly within various forms of feminist thought. Contemporary Western feminism (Weedon, 1987) is generally expressed in three major ways: (i) liberal feminism seeks equality for women within present economic and political arrangements, (ii) radical feminism values the distinctiveness of femaleness and separateness from patriarchal structures and, (iii) socialist feminism considers the complexity of gender, race, and class oppression as requiring a complete transformation of the social system. These forms can be broken down into various branches of thought rooted in political, economic, and religious stances.

While admitting that these forms of feminism celebrate the complexity of feminist thought and offer resistance to inclusive statements such as "all men," "all women," and "all people;" some feminist authors are beginning to see the necessity of offering a synthesis of common strands woven throughout these different perspectives (Jagger, 1983; Tong, 1988). As Tong states:

> We need a home in which everyone has a room of her own (Virginia Woolf's plea) but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation. (p. 7)

A Starting Point

A starting point for the conversation, a "new" point, is the actual experience of women as women. As Simone de Beauvoir in her book The Second Sex (first published in French, 1949) stated: "If I want to define myself, I must first of all state: I am a woman, on this truth must be based all further discussion" (p. 57). It is important to unpack this statement briefly, for it points to a basic concept about feminist consciousness that other contemporary feminist writers have continued to react to and develop. The "truth" of the statement for de Beauvoir is that existentially, "woman", in the sense of self-identified woman, doesn't exist at all. She has no history. Rather she is a social construct, made (male-defined) not born.

In summarizing de Beauvoir's work Shirley Rowbotham (1973) points out that the author's conclusion regarding the non-existence of "woman" based on the latter's synthesis "of the biological, psychological, cultural and historical destiny of the concept and situation of women" (p. 10), was partly in reaction to a tendency in rationalism which de Beauvoir felt had influenced liberal feminist and Marxist approaches to emancipation. Rowbotham states that this tendency implied that:

> the general cover of human-beingness camouflaged both the anatomical differences between men and women and concealed the manner in which the notion of the human being is male-defined in all forms of existing social organizations. (p. 11)

In Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (1973) Rowbotham continued to explore de Beauvoir's conclusion that it is difficult for a woman to experience

herself as a woman. The overlay of dominant male cultural representations alienate her from herself. However, unlike de Beauvoir, who did not initially assert the possibility of human agency in this alienation, Rowbotham asserts that while these cultural representations can lead women away from themselves, at the same time there is also the possibility of a new self-consciousness as women learn not to recognize themselves in the reflections. A dual consciousness arises in which women sense the split between being culturally defined and the sense of oneself as different from cultural prescription.

> But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity. . . . The manner in which we knew ourselves was at variance with ourselves as an historical being-woman. (Rowbotham, 1973, p. 31)

For a woman to voice the fact that "I am a woman" means to be conscious of herself as seeking self-identification and her own voice. She is ever aware that the dominant male culture has defined her, as de Beauvoir so aptly names, as "the second sex." I remember an occasion when I understood this for the first time in relation to my proposal for this study. In trying to define my question I told my advisor that it was important for me to ask "What does it mean for me as a woman to teach religious education?" He said that it sounded like a strange question. He had never thought of asking, "What does it mean for me as a man . . .?" I replied (gently, I hope) that, because he was a man, he owned the world and had named it. My question helped me to distance myself from that naming, which generally absented me, by voicing "What does it mean for me as woman?" We agreed that it would be good for both women and men to consider the meaning of their actions from their own perspectives, as women,

as men, in order to avoid the dominance of one representative way of viewing the world as it were through one mirror.

The question of the distinctiveness of women's perspectives, particularly in terms of self-identity will be referred to later in this chapter. At present I wish to return to the notion of dual consciousness since it points to a "dual task" for women which must be kept in mind in exploring the significance of feminist voice. The task includes (i) sensing and naming the oppression of one's "absence" from the world and (ii) a sense of one's own ability to "presence" oneself in the world and the value of this "presence" for all. As Maria Harris (1987) so aptly states we must:

> take up the dual task of listening to the silences
> around us and refusing to be silent any longer. (p. 103)

Naming One's Absence

The absence or silence about women has become personalized for me during this research. I have come to realize that the education I have received all my life, both religious and in general, has assumed that the way men thought about the world was normative for both sexes. Until recently men have written and designed books, sermons, and worship services. Women have also done these things, but men's authorship has been regarded as the acceptable canon for educational theory and theology.

Similarly women remain absent from most areas of social, political, economic, and religious life. In the social construct of our world, the inclusion of women is still viewed as the exception. Note our language: "woman doctor, woman lawyer, female minister." The general terms doctor, lawyer, and minister do not naturally include women. In Chapter Five I discuss the notion of equality as also in danger of being one more way of women being absent from the world

when it is still seen from the perspective of finally arriving at "standing in their line."

The terms "male nurse, male elementary teacher" could be used to justify the fact that men are also viewed as the exception in traditional work areas reserved for women. However, the professions of nursing and elementary teaching are not given the same "weight" in society, for example, as doctors or lawyers. Consequently, men who become nurses or elementary teachers frequently are made to feel inferior by being named as an exception within a woman's profession. Their sense of inferiority serves to reinforce the fact that inclusion of women in society is admitted in limiting ways that do not affect the overall construct of that society.

Many other examples of women's absence as women both in the public and personal realms of our lives could be given. Women are still generally referred to as someone else's wife, mother, or daughter. The loss of name in marriage is symbolic of this absence. Popular culture highlights the male-identified place of women in our modern world. The most damaging construct of a false representation is the image of woman as seductress, there to please men. This myth is evident in all forms of commercial advertising. It is more sadly evident in the difficulty of proving one's innocence as a woman in cases of rape and assault where the logic of this myth is so strong in society that it represents an unconscious "guilty until proven innocent" belief about women as a group. Symbolic of all this absence is the obvious example of language in which "man" and "he" are still generally accepted as representative of males and females.

Women name this absence when they speak of being oppressed. Obviously not all women are oppressed in the same way. Our black sisters have vigorously pointed out differences in oppression after reading about white

women's experiences (Lorde, 1982, 1984; Gannon, 1988). Nor does it mean that women have not been and are not oppressors themselves. The statement about oppression simply affirms a basic recognition about the patriarchal structure of our society. What is meant by the patriarchal structure? The following definition best fits my use of this term in this study. Dale Spender in Man-Made Language (1980) states that she draws on Cora Kaplan's concept of patriarchy in describing it "as the order under which we live, an order characterized by male dominance and the means - both actual and symbolic of perpetuating that dominance" (p. 15). Our patriarchal society assumes male normativeness. By doing so, it inherently proposes a hierarchical relationship between men and women in which men are considered superior and women are considered "other" or inferior. The power of the patriarchal structure is best told through the following story.

One summer a man in our feminist education class said to me, "For years I have insisted with women that I'm really a very nice man and certainly not to be identified with male oppression. However, I realize that because I am a man I cannot help but be part of the dominant male (patriarchal) structure which is oppressive. Part of my liberation is to admit that fact."

This statement rings true for any form of liberation for the oppressed of this world. For example, being white I must realize that I have been privileged by the world because of my color, or lack of it. I am structurally caught up in the oppression of those who are insultingly called non-whites, or worse, even though I myself may not be guilty of any acts of racial injustice. Parenthetically we in the Roman Catholic tradition have often referred to other traditions as non-Catholic. From the vantage point of the so-called "other" or "non-other", the first step in gaining liberation is the consciousness of seeking to name oneself.

For women this means the need to recognize that the patriarchy which names women as a "secondary other" is unjust, oppressive, and not divinely ordained.

Naming One's Presence

To suggest that feminist consciousness merely implies a critique of being absent or falsely spoken of in theories of human reality which have become embedded in social and religious structures does not do justice to the many women throughout history and today, who even in the most oppressive situations, have found the strength to refuse the reflections in the mirror. Coming to a consciousness of themselves as women they have acted on their own behalf to liberate themselves from patriarchal perspectives. As Gerda Lerner (1979) states in reaction to accounts of history written by some women that centralize women's oppression: "Such inquiry fails to elicit the positive and essential way in which women have functioned in history" (p. 147).

Emphasizing the importance of human agency, an emphasis which feminists share with critical theorists, is essential to understanding why feminists propose that the articulation of women's experiences, provides an alternative and valuable way to see and speak of human reality: as the authors of Women's Ways of Knowing (1986) state:

> When scientific findings, scientific theory and even the basic assumption of academic disciplines are re-examined through the lens of women's perspectives and values, new conclusions can be drawn and new directions forged that have implications for the lives of both men and women. (pp. 8-9)

A well known example of a different conclusion is Carol Gilligan's work on stages of moral development in women. In her book In a Different Voice (1980) she counteracts Kohlberg's supposedly objective theory of moral development which he based entirely on interviews with males. Gilligan suggests that

different conclusions can be reached when women are interviewed about their reactions to moral dilemmas. Why are different conclusions reached? The answers are extremely complex, but presume the varieties of feminist thought mentioned in the early part of this chapter. The topic is 'present' many times in the stories/themes related in further chapters. In this chapter I will simply point to some of the continuing threads of conversation within feminist theory regarding the concept of the self which, as Carol Gilligan has affirmed along with many other feminist writers, is a major factor in explaining why women see the world differently and offer different answers.

Susan Stanford Friedman's essay on "Women's Autobiographical Selves, Theory and Practice" (1988) discusses a basic characteristic of women's self-concept that is shared by a number of feminist writers. I used this essay on feminist writing since I see a strong parallel between "writing the self" and "voicing the self" whether that be in written, oral, or symbolic form. Her essay was written mainly in reaction to Georges Gusdorf's essay on "The Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (referred to in Friedman, 1988). In his essay, Gusdorf argued that autobiography is only possible in a culture where one can have a "conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life" (quoted in Friedman, p. 35). Friedman states that this leads to a "(mis)reading" of the autobiographical texts of women and minority groups. Women and minority groups, in having to contend with culturally imposed definitions as well as the "differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity," (p. 35) do not share in an isolated sense of self rooted in the paradigm of Western individualism. Instead women sense themselves as selves in a relational context.

Friedman draws on two feminist writers to account for this "different" sense of self. Nancy Chodorow (1978), speaking from a psychoanalytical

approach, uses the term "women mother" to express the fact that a woman can biologically mother as well as have a continuous sense of self in identifying with her own mother. Because "women mother" they come to know themselves in a relational and connected way. From another perspective, relating to critical social theory, Rowbotham (1973) speaks of this same relational sense of self in women by pointing to the strength of a collective identity formed out of being alienated from the dominant group:

> People who are without names, who do not know themselves, who have no culture, experience a kind of paralysis of consciousness. The first step is to connect and learn to trust one another. . . . Solidarity has to be a collective consciousness which at once comes through individual self-consciousness and transforms it. (pp. 27, 29)

Friedman's insight, based on her reading of Chodorow and Rowbotham, contradicts Gusdorf's statement that autobiography does not develop in cultures where "the individual does not oppose himself to all others: where he does not feel himself to exist outside of others" by saying that autobiography is only possible when:

> the individual does not feel herself to exist outside of others and still less against others but very much with others in an interdependent existence. (p. 38)

While feminist theorists generally agree on this relational sense of self experienced in women it should be noted that the reasons given raise up a continuing discussion among feminists (and others) about whether a sense of self different from men can be attributed to the innateness of being a woman. If not, is it merely a result of socialization in a patriarchal world or do both nature and nurture play a role together in determining sameness and difference?

I find the ideas offered by feminist biologists Lynda Birke and Gail Vines (1987) enlightening. They reject both nature and/or nurture reasons because

any of these reasons imply that nature is either not important or else it merely plays a role in the early stages of life, a role which is modified or supported by socialization later on. Consequently they propose an alternative view which incorporates a transformative change in our biological selves throughout life:

> Continuous and transformative change can occur throughout the individual's life and not just in early infancy. It is this notion of transformative process, in which the organism itself is an active agent, that we want to share here. (p. 564)

This transformative sense of the person as biologically active leads these authors to conclude that a gendered sense of self is always changing. A sense of self might not only be experienced differently between men and women, but also between women. As the authors state:

> One (perhaps controversial) consequence of this would be that the sense of gender identity/role experienced by some who had, say, suffered pain in menstruation or childbirth may be different from that someone who had experienced neither. (p. 567)

While the biological theses for the positions of these two biologists are complicated and not appropriate for this study, their insights remind me that it is not a simple matter to discuss the significance of feminist voice. I also wish to remind my readers that the intent of this study is not to solve the question of sameness or difference between men and women. Rather the purpose is to show that many women like myself experience ourselves as different and ask what this means for being present in our churches and our world. I also find that the concept of our bodies as continual active agents honors the complexity of the adolescent period which involves both physical and psychological change, both of which need to be attended to in assisting these young people to define themselves as females or males in an authentic manner. Surely the Christian

tradition which cherishes belief in a God expressing Self in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth should support the search for this authentic self-definition.

As a concluding statement on the topic of women's self concept it is interesting to note the shift in feminist thinking regarding the question of difference from men. In the early stages of the contemporary women's movement which was still rooted in liberal feminist thought, women tended to downplay any sense of their own uniqueness in order to "presence" themselves as equals in all forms of public life. To prove they were just as logical and rational as men, traits assumed to be masculine, women often denied or attempted to dissociate themselves from being identified as intuitive and emotional, traits assumed to be feminine. Since these assigned characteristics were generally accepted as a natural or inevitable part of one's own biology women were often led to "an almost total rejection of the role of biology in the construction of gender" (Birkes and Vines, 1987, p. 555). In turn this rejection of the role of biology in assigning gendered characteristics led in many cases to a rejection or devaluing of roles associated with biology and assumed feminine characteristics such as mothering and the place of women in the home. Many women and men associated all feminists as women who were out to destroy family life. This association can still be detected today.

As feminist experience and theorizing about it continued, the realization grew that the patriarchal system and not women's biology was at fault for assigning women to an inferior role. Feminists began to articulate new ways of honoring themselves as women. A re-emphasis in much of the feminist literature emerged about the differences between men and women, this time from women's perspectives of what is to be valued. As Sheila Collins (1974) states:

> We are now beginning to realize that the qualities which we have so long been associated and which previously were used against us are now worth saving and elevating. They are the very qualities that our overly masculinized, competitive, hierarchical society needs. (p. 99)

Personal Thoughts Regarding Self-Concept

While the question of difference in relationship to self-concept and self-understanding could be explored further, I feel it is necessary to interject some of my own thoughts as well as those of my partner-in-conversation for this study. As I was struggling with this section on "presence" I had an opportunity to talk with Maria, my partner-in-conversation.

She had been reading Models of God (1987) in which Sallie McFague reacts strongly to a dualistic view which sets up one hierarchical comparison against another: man/woman; soul/body; heaven/earth; humans/nature. I pointed out to Maria that this was my difficulty in writing about self-identity in women and in forming an idea of what it means for me to understand the "truth" of myself as woman. How do I do this without just switching the hierarchical dualisms around - woman/man - or collapsing both into a normativeness that assumes inclusion of both females and males?

We both agreed that this wasn't what we wanted to do. Then Maria said, very wisely, "maybe we won't know for another hundred years or so until we have learned how to experience life in our own way." The truth is not very comforting. Aware of the dualism present in our own understanding of ourselves, it will take some time to know, albeit in our own limited manner of knowing, what is authentically "woman" and what is someone else's construct of us. As Audre Lorde (1984) states in writing about the complex interrelationship of age, race, class, and gender: "We have no patterns for relating across our

human differences as equals." Because we lack these patterns "differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion" (p. 115).

Insights from feminist theology and feminist education can assist both women and men to discover some patterns for relating as equals, while respecting uniqueness. Since the stories/themes in this study are concerned with the interrelationship of feminist theology and education in the context of teaching religious education, I will only point to some foundational ways that feminist voice is being spoken in these two areas.

Feminist Theology - Voicing of Christian Feminists

To this point I have been drawing on various strands of feminist thought in an effort to weave together some central ways for articulating the significance of feminist voice. Not all these strands relate to the Christian viewpoint. Hence it becomes necessary for women like me who wish to identify themselves as Christian feminists to discern together what experiences of ourselves are valued in light of the teachings of Jesus. As women who feel the pain of our absence from many aspects of our Church life, we often wonder if the gospel message is indeed Good News for us! It is assuring to read Christian feminist theologians who speak of patriarchy as not being in harmony with the liberating message of Christ.

As Sallie McFague (1987) asserts, the story of Jesus proposes "a destabilizing, non-hierarchical vision." The relationship of Jesus with women of his day, attested to in the gospels, provides striking patterns of this vision. A poignant example is the recognition in all four Gospels of Mary Magdalen as the first witness of the Resurrection. This recognition emerges out of a culture

which did not accept the validity of women's testimony or the trust of the women's voice. How do Christian feminists approach the Bible? This is an important question to consider in this study since the Bible is the foundational source for sharing the Christian story.

A crucial question feminist theologians ask is whether the God of the Bible is truly One Who calls all people to full personhood. An obvious answer is yes. Does anyone want to say less of God? Yet it seems fairly evident that the Christian tradition historically has used, and uses, the Bible to support that God divinely wills the subordination and domination of humans over nature and man over woman (Trible, 1978). Some of this use of the Bible can be blamed on poor interpretation, using the text for one's own purposes. However, feminist work on the biblical text itself points out that the Bible is inherently patriarchal and therefore easily lends itself to this kind of interpretation. This fact has led some feminist writers to totally reject the Bible as being "irredeemably patriarchal" (Daly, 1973). However, the majority of feminist scripture scholars (such as Trible, 1978; Russell, 1974' Ruether, 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984) believe that it is possible to discover a God of liberation rather than of domination despite the patriarchal bias of much of the scriptural texts.

For example, Rosemary Ruether (1983) and Letty Russell (1974) both speak of the necessity for Christians to find a "usable past" in the Bible as essential for forming and reforming new ways of being in relationship with our God and ourselves. Part of that work lies in re-examining and reinterpreting the biblical texts in light of people's (in this case, women's) experiences, something that "has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past" (Reuther, 1983, p. 13). This re-viewing of Scripture is not a departure from belief in the Bible as a sacred story that is normative for our lives. The Bible's own pages reveal myriad ways of naming God as well as a constant

reinterpretation of the convenantal relationship in light of the changing historical situations of the Hebrew people.

The work of feminist scripture scholars and theologians in recovering the voices of women in the Christian story continues to provide encouragement and hope to Christian feminists today as we seek to voice our own experience as vital for embodying the full essence of the Gospel message. A significant Gospel passage for me is Luke's account of the woman who poured costly ointment over the head of Jesus, prefiguring the anointing of his body for burial. While others were angry at her for this "waste of ointment," Jesus stated: "I tell you solemnly, wherever throughout all the world the Good News is proclaimed, what she has done will be told also in remembrance of her" (Jerusalem Bible, Mark 14:9).

A second major concern for Christian feminists is the language and symbols used in Christian preaching, teaching and liturgical actions to name our God as well as our patterns of relationship with God and one another. The inclusion of woman's experiences as integral to the naming and celebrating of our Christian faith frequently challenges traditional Christian teachings. Women do not find in many of these teachings images of God that are respectful to a sense of ourselves as women. The contribution of feminist theology therefore speaks of God in such a way that supports the recognition of women as complete human beings. As Rosemary Ruether (1983) states:

> The critical principal of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of woman. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of woman is therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of woman must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine. (p. 19)

A most sensitive area with respect to reflecting the divine in women's humanity relates to the naming of our God. While there seems to be an increasingly open attitude in the Catholic community towards using inclusive language with respect to persons and even some emphasis on biblical female imagery for God, there remains a strong resistance towards the use of "mother" or "she" as referents for God, particularly in public liturgy. The most that has been done in a few places has been to "de-neuter" God by avoidance of the pronoun "he" or "she". My own expression, "our God" is an example of this. A plethora of feminist theological writing exists on this topic of naming God stemming from a recognition among feminists that, as Dale Spender (1980) states:

> The effect of making the Deity masculine should not be underestimated because it establishes one of the primary categories of our world as a male category. It immediately casts females into a negative position which can be further exploited. (pp. 166-167)

Although feminist theologians offer various alternatives in order to avoid "making the Deity masculine," all work from two basic assumptions. Mary Rose D'Angelo (1985) personalizes these:

> 1) I begin from the assumption that language that prescribes, assumes, or reinforces the insubordination of women cannot be adequate as language about God.
>
> 2) I assume that theology and all human language about God are radically anthropomorphic and metaphorical (not merely, but powerfully metaphorical), and faithful only in so far as they are constantly qualified and rethought. (p. 107)

For some feminist theologians like Carol Christ and Mary Daly, who name themselves as thealogians, a return to the pre-Christian Goddess sources has been the path chosen - a path away from any possibility of recovering

femaleness in the Christian God. Feminist theologians who continue to explore possibilities for naming God in ways that do not exclude them from the Christian tradition encourage the use of multiple ways of naming and imaging. They point out that these multiple forms are already present in Scripture as well as in the spiritual writings of women and men throughout Christian history. We can also draw on our own experiences as women rooted in our particular history and culture.

The major cautions offered by Christian feminists are avoiding the trap of naming God one way to the exclusion of all other ways and people and the danger of assuming that God is that way. As Sallie McFague (1982) states:

> No one model is adequate and indeed, all models together are not adequate to express our experiences of relating to God . . . the basic problem with the patriarchal model has been its expansion, its inclusiveness, its hegemony, its elevation to an idol. (p. 190)

Whether one names God personally or communally, it is important to remember that naming and imaging have a political significance. This fact was brought home to me very powerfully at a feminist theology workshop. I was asked to name both my image of God and to state whose interests such an image serves. A crucial question for all believers in God to ask themselves from time to time.

The theological issues discussed briefly here will return in later chapters. The next section will discuss some of the ways that feminist educators envision what we teach and how we teach as inclusive of women's voices. Their educational insights are not unrelated to those who write out of a theological interest. As Barbara Mitrano (1979) states in an article entitled "Feminist Theology and Curriculum Theory":

> There is a common focus on experience - not any experience, but individual experience, what I have

> lived. In the case of feminist theology, this is the experience of what is commonly called God. In the case of curriculum theorists, this is the experience of education. (p. 211)

Feminist Education - Voicing of Feminist Educators

> A curriculum designed for my child is a conversation that leaves spaces for her responses, that is transformed by her questions (Grumet, 1988, p. 173).

I begin this section with a quotation by Madeleine Grumet who, by speaking out of a parental desire for her own child, outlines two central concerns present in feminist writings on education: (1) how the feminist teacher understands herself and voices herself within the patriarchal system of schooling and (2) a curriculum concern as to what is taught and how it is taught.

It is important to recognize that feminist concerns about education are those posed by many contemporary education theorists. Most of these theorists write from a critical social theory perspective. However, the significant perspective that feminists bring to education is the "heightened consciousness of gender" (Culley and Portugues, 1985, p. 3). These same authors point out that "little of the progressive educational theory of the last several decades - Friere included - addressed questions of gender" (p. 3). Feminists theorists like Frances Maher (1987), in reflecting on the work of Friere, state:

> Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. In our terms,women need to name and describe our world, to differentiate its terms and meanings from those of male experiences, if only to see our commonalities as well. (p. 40)

How do feminist teachers name and describe the world of teaching? Since this study is directed towards the teaching/learning activity occurring in the classroom, it does not explicitly address the larger issue of the educational

institution as an agent of patriarchal ideology (Rich, 1979). Nevertheless, the conversations that my research partner and I have had regarding what it means to understand ourselves as feminist teachers include glimpses of what some feminist theorists speak of as the tension between ourselves as intellectuals, dedicated to the professional goals of education, and ourselves as nurturers and caregivers (Noddings, 1984; Culley and Portugues, 1985; Grumet, 1988). In their reflection on "the politics of nurturance," Culley and Portugues (1985) state that this tension exists because:

> in our culture the role of nurturer and intellectual have been separated not just by gender, but by function; to try to recombine them is to create confusion. (p. 13)

This confusion can be noted in the reasons that some women give for not applying for administrative positions. It is important to note the word "some." There are many valid reasons that women, like men, have for not wishing to be administrators. The fact remains, however, that the role of caregiver is still societally assigned to women. Women are expected not to jeopardize family life by taking on too demanding a task outside the home. Also they are often judged as not having "what it takes," (i.e. masculine characteristics) for administration. It is also evident in the way that some women who do accept administration positions sadly seem to lose the truth of themselves as women. For feminist classroom teachers the confusion particularly arises as we confront our own "authoritative" voice vis-a-vis the powerlessness of our students.

Feminist educators like Madeleine Grumet (1988) have recognized this tension for teachers of symbolically being "mother" in the world of the "father" and have cautioned against replacing "the public discourse of the father" for the "domestic discourse of the mother." Rather the place of the curriculum, educational discourse, should be "named as our mediating space, the place

where we can heal" (p. xi). As the authors of Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching (1985) state: "The feminist classroom may be the place where the cultural split between mother/father is healed" (p. 118).

The task of the feminist teacher, therefore, is to develop ways of educating that challenge the patriarchal order of hierarchy and domination in a healing rather than a destructive manner. In this regard Patti Lather (1984) considers the work of feminist teachers as a "counter-hegemonic" which provides "an ethical alternative to the dominant hegemony, a lived experience of how the world can be" (quoted in Weiler, 1988, p. 54). Hopefully, this story of teaching, told from a feminist perspective, can contribute to the development of such an "ethical alternative."

An important aspect, with regard to curriculum content, is the raising of consciousness of both females and males to the fact that:

> the content of education itself validates men even as it invalidates women. Its very message is that men have been the shapers and thinkers (the priests, the prophets) of the world, and that this is only natural (Rich, 1979, quoted in Culley and Portugues, 1985, p. 25).

Adrienne Rich also astutely comments in this same reference that the concept of "co-education" becomes rather misleading "under such content conditions."

I have already referred to feminist concerns regarding the absence of women's experiences in major theoretical and theological discourses on the nature of "man", and "mankind." I have also given a number of examples of how feminist theorists and theologians are seeking to reformulate and reorganize knowledge about humans by attentiveness to how women experience themselves in the world. It has been important for me to remember the words of Charlotte Bunch that it is not enough just "to add women and stir." For this reason special attention has been given in this study centered on religious

education to the significance of the presence of women in the Christian story, particularly in the normative story of Jesus recorded in the New Testament.

Integrally related to what we teach is how we teach it. As Nancy Schniedewind (1983) states:

> Students I believe learn as much from the process of a course - its hidden curriculum - as from the explicit content . . . feminism necessitates not only the development of new knowledge but also new forms of relationship between people. (pp. 261, 262)

How do feminist educators propose to develop these "new forms of relationships?" What does it mean to speak of feminist pedagogy or more rightfully speaking, feminist pedagogies? A number of feminist authors have contributed to a discussion of these questions. Frances Maher (1985, 1987) is representative of these authors.

Frances Maher (1987) distinguishes between two alternative approaches to feminist pedagogy based on the contributions of liberation pedagogy and theories of women's development. Liberation pedagogy associated with critical theorists (such as Friere, 1970; Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1982) asserts that education should help people recognize their oppression and empower them to act on behalf of their own emancipation. Feminist pedagogy rooted in this approach seeks for "the recovery of women's voices, experiences and viewpoints as an exercise in self-discovery and resistance" (Maher, 1987, p. 94). For this recovery to occur, certain ways of teaching are stressed. These include interactive pedagogy, cooperatively structured learning, models of female empowerment, and the use of personal experiences of oppression as ways of validating or not validating traditional forms of knowledge (Maher, 1985; Schniedewind, 1985; Bunch and Pollack, 1983). Of particular relevancy to this study is Maher's promotion of the need for adolescents "to pay attention to their

internal thoughts as uniquely their own" (1985, p. 61) and to express their thoughts in writing about such topics as gender bias and sexual discrimination.

Theories of women's development concerned with those aspects of female identity is generally associated with women's roles in the private sphere of the family and emphasize women's relational ways of coming to know the world. Such relational knowledge engenders qualities like empathy, nurturance, cooperativeness, and sensitivity (Miller,1976; Gilligan, 1980; Noddings, 1984). Maher states that proponents of this view point out that a relational way of knowing and its associated qualities have been demeaned by men who have upheld the superiority objective knowledge. Objectivity is more closely associated with their roles in the public sphere which emphasize competition, rationality, and autonomy. These same proponents argue for the importance of recognizing that the rational and emotive ways of knowing should both become accepted as valid and universal, rather than genderized ways of "approaching the 'truth' of any experience" (Maher, 1987, p. 96).

This gender model of teaching emphasizes the need to educate for emotional and intuitive ways of learning on an equal par with rational ways (Martin, 1985). Such teaching requires an uncovering of "feminine" qualities referred to above in order to "see how they have both defined and repressed women, see how they are part of men's experiences too, and use them to reformulate our views of human experience" (Maher, 1985, p. 53). In a similar way, an uncritical emphasis on "masculine" characteristics can be repressive for men.

Maher (1987) concludes her discussion of liberation and gender based models of learning by calling for a synthesis of both. She states: "Since the gender models ignore power and the liberation models tend to ignore the personal domain, a pedagogy for both personal agency and public

effectiveness needs both strands of thought" (p. 98). Insights from both models have assisted my partner-in-conversation and myself in our consideration of the content and manner of teaching religious education to adolescents.

Conclusion

In conclusion I want to raise the question of what is the goal of feminist education? Is the inclusion of feminist voice in this study seen as an end in itself or a means to an end? To answer this question I begin by concurring with Letty Russell (1974) who refers to the work of feminist theology as a "contribution to the unfinished dimension of theology" (p. 53). For me any authentic theology or educational theory should have mutuality as its goal as it seeks to bring the "I-ness" of a particular experience - women, blacks, unemployed - to bear upon the "We-ness" of a religious community, an educational community that should work for the liberation of all people. For this reason I end this chapter with the following inspiring statement from Barbara Mitrano (1981) since I, Barbara Rice, also wish to own her vision for feminist education, a vision which encourages a sense of wholeness for all people.

> When stretched into the future, the concept of wholeness is much more than the balancing out of individual traits labeled "masculine", "feminine". It means much more than infusing the "feminine" principles into men. It means much more than working towards androgyny as the ultimate goal. It means finally, a new definition of what it means to be a human being. (p. 62)

As a Christian believing in the One Who offers life, "life in abundance" to all, I say Alleluia to this kind of vision. It is the vision fundamental to the goal of religious education.

In the next four chapters I will present in thematic form the major experiences of this study as they relate to the question of a feminist perspective

for the religious education of adolescents. I believe that these themes and the conclusions drawn from them show that religious education can be an important way for female adolescents to recognize their own voice.

Key Terms

Voice

The notion of "voice" is a prominent one in feminist literature (Gilligan, 1980; Miller, 1982; Weiler, 1988). As a metaphor, "voice" provides a way for women to insist on their presence as women in the world. As Belenky et al. (1986) state, "we became aware that it (voice) is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experiences and development" (p. 18). Using this metaphor I often refer to women or female adolescents as speaking from their own perspective or with their own voice. The singular use of perspective or voice used in a metaphorical sense is not meant to insinuate that all women think, feel, and speak the same way. This chapter should demonstrate the distinctiveness of "voice" without denying the plurality of many voices heard and spoken in this study.

Feminist Voice

This term is used as a metaphor for learning to speak about my own feminist consciousness particularly with respect to being a woman in the Catholic Church. It is not intended as an inclusive way of speaking of other women's experiences.

Christian Feminist

This term is used to indicate that the consciousness of myself as a woman is integrally linked to my understanding of myself as a Christian within the Roman Catholic (Latin-rite) tradition. This link allows me to envision the

ability to find my own voice as being in harmony with, as well as being challenged by, the message of liberation for all proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

Feminist Consciousness

This term essentially includes two aspects. The recognition and naming by women of their oppression in being silenced in multiple ways by the patriarchal order. The conviction that as women we can and do actively engage in our own liberation by insisting that our experience of being in the world be regarded as equally valid for contributing to the way human beings understand their world and live relationally within it.

Personal Comment on Feminist Voice

Originally I felt reluctant to use the word "feminist" in this proposal. I am very aware of the various reactions to this word. It tends to evoke certain sharp and negative images such as angry women out to get men, bad mothers disrupting family life, or irritating women not knowing their place in church. Yet, in spite of the fears it raises for many men and women, I am going to risk using it. Not to do so would be accepting to be silent about something that I and a number of other women (and some men) want to say with respect to where we find ourselves, or do not find ourselves, within our religious tradition and religious education classes. Hopefully, using the term "feminist" in this study can contribute to its more positive meaning in terms of what it symbolizes not only for speaking of the complexity of women's experiences but also as one way of pointing to the goal of creative and mutual dialogue between all people.

SECTION TWO: RESEARCH THEMES

CHAPTER FIVE

EQUALITY EQUALS?

Introduction

"Women are now doing men things; men are getting better at helping in the home." This statement made by one of the girls on my third visit to the classroom stands out as a classic expression of how both girls and boys perceived the notion of equality which was a central topic whenever they engaged in conversation about feminist issues, generally referred to as "the women's lib thing."

The statement was made during a discussion about the rights of females and males in which both girls and boys argued that they were discriminated against on the basis of their sex. Boys used the example of higher auto insurance rates and being laughed at if they said they were taking ballet lessons. Most boys laughed at the remark about ballet lessons which, to me, was a sign that they would probably discriminate against one of their own being involved in what one boy referred to as "wimpy stuff."

Girls, on the other hand, pointed out that they couldn't go to war and that they often had to have higher qualifications to get the same job. It was interesting to note, however, that apart from this one occasion I never heard the boys argue for equal rights in terms of wishing to be equal to girls. The topic of equality, which arose many times, centered on the fact that equality equals being able to do what men can do. Of special note to this topic was the question of girls' involvement in the military as well as attitudes expressed towards women who stayed at home. Before exploring these two aspects I will

first describe some general meanings that were attached to their idea of what equality meant.

Entrance Into The Male World

Because I was rather fascinated by the statement made by the girl quoted above, I asked Maria if I could invite the students to answer the following written question:

> "Women are now doing men things" (explained as quote from a student). What do you think the person meant by this statement? Is this a good idea for women?

The following two written statements reflect the general tone of the responses:

> Girl: I think this person meant that the labor force is opening up for women, and that women are now not limiting themselves from the traditional stereotyped women's roles. This is a good idea because some women are capable of doing jobs men have been doing for a long time.
>
> Boy: This statement means that women are now in the workforce truly because women are now construction workers, police officers, and a few are firefighters. Yes, I think this is a good idea because I don't think women should rely on men for an income.

Both responses reveal commonly held attitudes in our society. One of these attitudes is revealed by the word "truly." Without imputing any particular beliefs to the individual boy, his statement nevertheless reflects the fact that unpaid work, the work of the home, is not "truly" work and, therefore, does not have the same value as work done in paid employment situations. Another attitude reflected by the statement of the girl is that as long as females are capable they will have equal access to the same career opportunities as men, a fact that many women today could still demonstrate is not true. As the teacher

pointed out to me in one of our outside class discussions, the confidence of the girls simply reflected their lack of experience in the workplace.

At one point in a separate discussion with the girls I tried to challenge the belief in equal opportunities based on personal capability by asking them the following question: "If I told you I went to the doctor today who would you assume I went to?" They all said "a man." We then went on to talk about why we use the terms "male nurse," "lady doctor." I think they began to see that certain professions are still regarded very much as men's professions or women's professions which implies that there is more than personal capability involved.

Apart from the exception of the military in terms of combat, which will be discussed later, the boys never displayed any objection to the idea of girls being able to work in traditional male careers. In fact their acceptance was used in defense of the fact that men were changing their attitudes towards women. This defense was particularly evident in a section of the script produced for their videoprogram in which three girls and three boys were discussing whether or not things had changed for women since the time of Jesus. The following statements are a part of the script:

> Girl: It seems like we always have to prove ourselves as strong and knowledgeable as men.
>
> Boy: But this has been happening since the beginning of time, it can't change with the snap of a finger.
>
> Boy: Besides a lot has been happening to make males and females more equal. Women are allowed into the army, airforce and other jobs only reserved for men.
>
> Boy: There are tons of females in the working world not just sales clerks, secretaries and teachers either.

Maria and I had to smile at this statement. Obviously the female dominated professions don't rate as signs of equality.

It is evident from these statements and many other similar ones that the idea of equality was judged by both girls and boys on the basis of whether or not women are "allowed" into jobs "usually reserved for men." In spite of the fact that there is more public emphasis on the value of men raising children and even for some men to be the parent who stays at home with the children, no boy ever expressed the idea that equality could mean sharing with or replacing women in the home. It is also significant that girls never argued for this kind of equality. In fact the statement that "men are getting better at helping in the home" indicates to me an acceptance that the home is still regarded as women's domain. How was this "women's domain" valued?

The Value of Staying at Home

It has already been mentioned that equality was never referred to as the ability to enter into the traditionally viewed women's world, that of taking care of the home and being primary caregivers regarding the raising of children. In fact, the emphasis on equality with respect to work done outside the home seemed to often cause rather derogatory remarks to be made about women who did stay at home:

> Girl: Women are now in the career world instead of just staying at home and having babies.
>
> Boy: Women aren't expected to be housemothers.

I was very uncomfortable with remarks such as these since I believe that it is important for young people who are beginning to think about the future to recognize that liberation for women is not necessarily concomitant with not choosing to stay at home. After class Maria and I noted the word "just" in the girl's statement quoted above. We remarked on the fact of how often women who work in the home apologetically use the word "just" to describe themselves.

I asked Maria what she thought about the student's comments regarding women who stay at home. Was I reading into them a devaluing of women who do not choose a career outside of the home? She felt that perhaps I was, saying that she believed that the girls understood it as a matter of choice, rather than valuing one career decision over another.

When I had an opportunity to talk to the girls separately I told them that their comments about housewives really bothered me. They seemed surprised and several of them immediately referred to the fact that it was important to be able to make a choice. The discussion spontaneously led to a number of girls sharing wonderful stories about their mothers, referring to them as "friends," "someone you could turn to." One girl used this occasion to repeat what she had said quite firmly many times. She wasn't interested in a career since she wished to "stay home, have children and take care of them."

Her statement was always received respectfully by the other students. However, I wondered what kind of choice lay beneath her statement. I wasn't sure whether it was really a free choice statement in the sense of a female identified choice or whether she was influenced, for example, by her family background to see it as "her" role. I think it is difficult for females to really be free enough to make the choice to stay home or pursue a career from their own perspective. The "choice" can still be either a wish to be like males or an acceptance that females don't belong in the assumed male-world.

The general discussion with the girls, however, made me realize that, from their perception, staying at home was valued provided women could make a choice. Yet, personally, I felt that the value they attached to staying at home was influenced more by the fact that a number of the girls related warmly to the fact of them having a mother at home, a value that was strongly expressed in the stories about their mothers.

What was interesting, however, with respect to the idea of choice was that it was still viewed as something that women chose to do. Men simply did not feature in their conversation with me even when I mentioned that many men are now present at the birth of their babies and are helping to raise children. As I catch myself writing the word, "helping," I realize that I, too, like these female students, am still socialized to think of men as helping women to their (women's) tasks. And this is written despite my belief that men should play a prominent nurturing role in the home because it is their role as well as women's. In this regard I learned a good lesson when I said to a woman in one of my classes who had recently given birth, "Is your husband babysitting this evening?" "No," she replied, "He is at home with his daughter."

As these various conversations on equality took place and the teacher and I began to realize how entrenched the idea of equality was judged as being able to do what men can do, I suggested to Maria that we begin to challenge this notion of equality by raising the topic of whether or not women should be allowed to engage in combat. Although the idea of women not being allowed to go to war had been used as an example of inequality, I expected that if the actualities of combat were pursued the girls would reject the idea of at least women's involvement. This did not prove to be the case.

Charging Up Mount Equality

The article used to promote discussion on the topic of combat was taken from a newspaper. It was entitled "Do we need females on the killing fields?" The story centered on a woman who had led combat troops into Panama as part of the U.S. invasion of that country. Discussion on this article took place at a time when we had separated the boys and girls in order to give each group a

chance to react to the topic of women as my visits to the classroom were coming to an end. Maria chose to absent herself from these discussions as she felt it would be good for the students to have a chance to speak directly with me. I was pleasantly surprised at their frankness and apparent comfort level in meeting with me alone.

Essentially the argument put forth by the author is that he disagrees with the idea of a woman "charging up Mt. Equality" by proving that she is equally capable of killing as men are. His point is that women should not be allowed into combat not because they are the weaker sex, which is the traditional reason given, but because women should ask themselves "what kind of society are we when similar opportunity in killing is the standard for equality?" While the author does not specifically state that neither should men be on the killing fields the implication is that killing is precisely what women should be objecting to rather than trying to join men as proof of equality. His argument reflects many feminist writers today who see an integral link between being feminist and promoting non-violence. I hoped that the article would suggest to the students that perhaps there are alternatives to seeing equality as always seeking entrance into the traditionally reserved male world.

In both of my meetings with the girls and boys I first checked to see if they were familiar with the general events of the story. They were, although they were not aware of the involvement of a woman in active combat. I was very up front about my own bias as I began to tell them a little about the article. I stated that it had been written by a man and that I definitely agreed with what he had to say. At the time I thought it was good to show that a male author reflected the perspective of many feminists who would reject as a goal of feminism the striving for entrance into the male world at all costs. Yet, in writing about my choice now I wonder if it was good to use a male critic to challenge a woman's

actions. Perhaps it would have been more valuable to find a female author thus giving the opportunity for the students to see that not all women, even those who refer to themselves as feminists, argue for equal access to the male world.

In contrast to my reflection, Maria thought that because the article was being presented to adolescents it was good that they had to "listen to a male author." Then they couldn't reject the article because it was "another woman saying this." I think I can hear Maria's argument. If it is true, and I suspect it could be, it points to the difficulty expressed many times in this study of women coming "out of the silence" to speak with their own voice.

I was quite surprised at the reactions of both the girls and the boys. To begin with the majority of the girls saw nothing wrong with killing. The following comments reflect their reactions:

> If I saw my mum and dad being attacked I would . . .
>
> If I was being attacked . . .
>
> You know how they talk about turning the other cheek, well I wouldn't do that.

Only one girl mentioned that perhaps we shouldn't be fighting. I think her "we" meant both males and females. I suppose that I shouldn't have been surprised considering the amount of violence that they are exposed to every day either through media or in their own lives. Somehow I thought that the emphasis on peace education, which is considered an important part of the religious education program at all grade levels, might have influenced them to at least question the violence. However, in reflecting upon the girl's responses I realize the difficulty of presenting the value of peacemaking to females who are aware that they need to find ways of defending themselves against personal, sexual attacks. The language of being "attacked" featured prominently in their responses. What does it mean to speak of non-violence then? Perhaps the girl

who reacted to the biblical teaching on "turning the other cheek" has seen in this teaching a call to be passive, defenceless against violence? If men can be violent in killing why can't women learn to equally respond - at least to defend themselves?

Maria pointed out after she had read the above questions that the girls seemed to concentrate on the freedom to choose rather than on what is being chosen. She said it is as if they are saying, "You can't close the door on me. Let me in and I will choose whether I want to be in the army or not." Maria and I reflected on the fact that while it is important to be able to make a choice, we, too, often get caught up in the idea of choosing rather than thinking about the implications of our choice.

As mentioned earlier, the idea of women going into combat was one area that was not acceptable to the boys. In relation to this article I asked the boys why they thought women shouldn't be allowed to go to war. Their responses were quite thought provoking:

> Because they have to stay and have children and and work as a nurse.
>
> Because if a woman went to war she could get raped and get pregnant.
>
> Well they wouldn't be able to shoot a woman as easy as a man.
>
> You know in the camps when the sergeant says you scums and stuff like that - I don't think women could take that.

They also made a number of lighthearted jokes about women being in the trenches and getting upset about breaking a nail or messing up their hair.

I really got excited during this discussion and even interrupted by saying, "How can you think it is good to shoot anyone?", "I can't accept that that's the way we should ever talk to another human being." One boy responded to my

last statement by saying, "it's character building." I retorted strongly, "I'm sorry, you can meet a lot of men that have been through this character building stuff and it has destroyed them." Finally one boy said, "I guess it's not really good for anyone." On one hand I could interpret this comment as an effort to placate me. On the other hand his statement did seem to be a thoughtful response to my reaction. A reflection on my own intervention is made at the end of this section.

I am not sure if my heated comments made a difference to the boy's view on this topic. Somehow I wanted them desperately to see that they weren't treating themselves as human beings in accepting that violence was all right for men. I was glad they excluded women but I hope one day they will also expect equal treatment (i.e. non violent treatment) for themselves. Maybe as an aside, but perhaps an important one, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that the boys easily identified with the article in terms of it being a combat story. The girls instead applied the article to the kind of violence that people can experience in every day life.

It is true that as a researcher I intervened strongly with my own bias with respect to the topic under discussion. I remind my readers that "working for change" is an important part of feminist methodology (Weiler, 1988). However, change is not meant to occur by coercion which isn't really change at all. The tone of this classroom allowed for an honest discussion of topics where both teacher and students were free to make their point. My freedom to react reflects this tone although I admit that teacher bias can influence students to repeat the teacher perspective rather than their own. In my own defense I believe that a show of emotion on such a topic as violence is not a bad thing in a religious education class.

Meaning of Equality for Themselves as Adolescents

I found it intriguing that the topic of equality was never directed towards their own situation as adolescents. In fact, I finally asked the girls in one of our separate sessions held during a regular religion class period whether or not they felt that they were treated equally to boys, for example, in school. One girl said they were treated equally to boys. She noted that both girls and boys were discriminated against "because we are teenagers." All the girls nodded assent or murmured approvingly at her statement.

It is not possible to state whether or not the girls are in fact treated equally in school since this was not a question I chose to pursue directly. However, when the girl quoted above made her statement I remembered one day when Maria came in wearing the school soccer shirt with the image of two boys on it. Many of the students were also wearing the same T-shirt. Maria chose this occasion to ask the students if they noticed anything about the shirt that they were wearing. Nobody made any response though one girl said quietly to me, "I know what she is going to say. She said the same thing about no girls being on it last year." This is exactly what Maria did go on to state pointing out that it did not reflect the fact that girls and boys play on the same soccer team.

I do not use this example to argue unequal treatment of girls but rather to raise the question of whether or not girls "see" the inequality in their "absence"? Presented always with the male image whether it be on the T-shirt or in the stories of the Christian tradition, are the girls so accustomed to their "absence" that they assume that they are there? I did for many years.

This incident with the T-shirt made me realize that girls may assume they are treated equally even when they are not. I am not suggesting that if the girls' image was on the T-shirt that this would imply equal treatment of girls in school.

However, I believe that the presence or absence of an image makes a strong statement about people's perceptions of themselves and the world. The point being made here is that the girls did not appear to notice the inequality implied by absence of their image.

It is also significant that the girls made no comment when they were asked about the image on the T-shirt or when Maria pointed out that girls should have been represented. I thought that perhaps they see but are reluctant to voice their perceptions. Maria felt that they didn't see it in terms of their absence. They simply regard it as "our (school) T-shirt." Her viewpoint made me realize that if these young girls are going to speak with their own voice they must first of all learn to see with new eyes. Otherwise, simply pointing out their absence, for example, would just be a case of a teacher putting "words into their mouths" as the saying goes, even with respect to feminist issues.

I found it noteworthy, however, that as the buzzer went at the end of the session in which they had asserted equality I asked them quickly what questions they would like me to ask the boys. One girl said spontaneously, "Yes, ask them why they think they are superior." Most of the girls chimed in, "Yeah." This off the cuff reaction seems to indicate that they feel that they are regarded as inferior by the boys. Perhaps they do see some things. It might have been valuable to pursue with them what rationale they had for thinking that boys view themselves as being superior. Would this line of thought have lead to some glimpses about unequal treatment even in school?

Maria said several times after class, "I think the girls feel powerless, that's why they don't say anything" (for example, with respect to the T-shirt). In relation to this feeling of being powerless I shall never forget the questioning statement of one girl when we were discussing whether or not women were acceptable in the "male" world of career and professions. These are her exact

words, "Well God - He created the world, and so it's a man's world, isn't it? It isn't a lady's world." This statement was made in a separate session with the girls and no one questioned it. I remember being absolutely taken back by the statement for I realized that equality as entrance into the male world had been linked to the idea of God being assumed to be male. In this simple, blunt statement the young girl was pointing, like many Christian feminists, to the fact that reference to God as a male God has consequences for the way we understand ourselves in the everyday world of relationships (Spender, 1980). My own response to her statement at the time was, "Well, we are going to have to talk about this another time." The topic was pursued to a certain degree and is related in Chapter Seven.

Interpreting the Equals Sign for Ourselves as Adults

The concept of equality as measuring up to what men can do was reflected on numerous times by Maria and me in our own struggles to both recognize what was really being said, or even possible to have been said by the students, as well as trying to understand our own meaning. In similar fashion to the girls we found that despite our Christian belief about equality stated below we spend a lot of time measuring equality in terms of male norms. It is important to share our reflections as part of this study since it was our own life experiences as well as our reflections on the students' reactions to the same topics that provided insights for teaching religious education from a feminist perspective.

Both of us believe that a Christian perspective on equality is based on the notion of the full human dignity of both female and male created in God's image. This is a belief which should take us way beyond measuring ourselves

as equal in terms of what men can do. Yet, at the same time we are faced with a church and a profession that is only realizing slowly the implications of the Christian belief in the full dignity of women. Excluded from leadership, for example, we paradoxically find ourselves objecting to the exclusion yet wondering if we should want to be part of it (reference to my own story in Chapter One). And, if we were included, would our presence make a difference to priesthood or administration?

Of course, with respect to administration in our Catholic schools, women know that we are being "allowed" into leadership positions. Yet, that is precisely how many women still feel about it. Permission is being granted to gain entrance into a male world. It is no wonder then that we fall into the trap, like the adolescents, of drawing on that way of seeing for our definition of equality.

How do we recover from a view of equality which does not begin with the truth of ourselves as being women (de Beauvoir, 1949)? Maria and I tried to discover some of this truth in our discussions about leadership positions. Maria so aptly stated that first of all we need to develop a spirituality for ourselves as women leaders. In reflecting on a number of fine women we know who have "made it" into administration we felt that they had done so at the loss of themselves. Not only was it a case for them of doing what men can do but of also imitating how men do it. In reference to this latter comment Maria stated, "I can be an administrator but I don't have to be an institutional one."

We did not spend much time developing what a non-institutional form of administration would actually "look" like. We did speak of the importance of connection. Leadership should not dis-connect us from either ourselves or from others as it so often seems to do. Maria introduced me to a wonderful image for connection. She referred to the character of Aslan in C.S. Lewis' The Lion, The

Witch and the Wardrobe. In order to be able to communicate with the children Aslan would breathe on them to let them know he was present. Sharing in his breath, as it were, they felt encouraged to become their very best. There was no separation or competition between the boys and the girls. All felt connected to each other because of Aslan.

Out of our Christian tradition we easily made interpretive links to this imagery, links that we felt should help us (and men also) to re-image traditional notions of hierarchical leadership. Of course, as Maria so humorously put it, one couldn't use this story to help adolescents consider connection over competition. They would just get into joking about bad breath.

We also spoke about the risk and challenge of imaging administration in ways that allow us to voice ourselves as women. Would we be acceptable? I shared with Maria my reflections on the following reading. In her book, Making Connections, Beverly Harrison (1985) speaks of her experience as an administrator. For many years she felt and thought that she was accepted among her male colleagues. Gradually she realized that her acceptability "was undoubtedly my ability to do things the way men did them" (p. 209). She often received "compliments" such as "you are really one of the boys" (p. 209). Similar remarks such as the latter gave her a subtle message that she was acceptable because she was "not like" other women.

I have received the same kind of comments (though not so much lately!) and sometimes I was grateful for the distinction made between myself and some aspects of feminism with which I cannot and do not wish to identify. On the other hand, like the author quoted, I now realize, having developed a feminist consciousness myself, that often I received these "compliments" as compliments because I was impatient with women who questioned the structures that I was very comfortable with at the time.

Like Harrison, it was only when I began to see with my own eyes and voice some critical questions about the way things were done that my acceptability level lessened at times. As Harrison (1985) states, "I lived to learn that not all of the support I had experienced was due to genuine appreciation of my strength" (pp. 213-4).

Maria could not relate to my experiences of this reading since she is not an administrator. However, because she is thinking about applying she had recently gone to a meeting set up to encourage women to consider administration. Several women administrators made presentations at this meeting. She felt that they would have related to the reading and my experiences very well. This topic also caused Maria to think about her own image on her staff. I refer to her reflections in Chapter Six.

I believe that our own struggles to come to terms with the meaning of equality made it difficult for us to see how we could encourage adolescents to think about equality in the Christian sense referred to earlier. When one is faced with the exigencies of everyday life it is hard to remember the vision. A real case in point was the student's discussion on men and women going to war.

As Maria pointed out, media wise the boys are "assaulted with so many 'Rambo' images" that depict males as males because they are capable of and indeed must defend themselves (and whoever and whatever they wish to protect) in ways that are violent. There are not too many "Gandhi" images to live up to for them. And even more complicated is the fact that Christian teaching from the time of Constantine gradually developed a just war theory - a theory that is only finally being questioned seriously today by many people. Hence, Christians for the most part have lost the strength of the "Christ" image of putting

away the sword, of turning the other cheek. In "real" life these actions are considered cowardly, not sticking up for oneself.

For the girls the insight with respect to combat in war was different from the boys. For them the discussion had led immediately to personal references to bodily violence in terms of assault towards themselves and those they care about. And here, as religious educators, Maria and I admitted that it is more difficult to talk about "turning the other cheek." At a time in society when people, particularly the victimized, are finally beginning to speak openly about violence against women, we wondered what Christian response can replace the idea of a self-defense that espouses the violence we protest against? We never answered this question for ourselves or with the students in this study. The theme of "Casting the first stone" explored in Chapter Eight demonstrates that it is a difficult question to answer.

As I write this paragraph I am acutely aware of a nine year old girl who I know very well. Next week she is going to court to testify against a man who sexually assaulted her a few months ago. It is quite possible in her religious education classes that she has recently heard the teachings, "turn the other cheek," and "love your enemies." While I think that I grasp the fundamental vision of unconditional forgiveness in these Christian teachings, at the same time I wonder if she could make any other response than that of the junior high girl I quoted earlier, - "turning the other cheek, well I wouldn't do that."

Concluding Insights for Religious Education

One important insight I gained from this theme "Equality equals?" is that the liberal feminist position is alive and well in this grade nine class. Even more intriguingly, I began to realize after reading this chapter that the kind of

discourse we as teachers encouraged may have contributed to an affirmation of this position in spite of ourselves. First, what is the liberal feminist position?

The liberal feminist position is frequently located as being historically the first stage of the contemporary women's movement, emanating from the earlier women's struggle mainly for the vote. As such, liberal feminists are seen to continue the struggle to be heard in their demands for equal access to all forms of the male symbolic order (Davies, 1989). In Chapter Four the liberal feminist position was reviewed in more detail with respect to its effect on education. An effect which emphasizes that females should have equal access to the same educational opportunities as males.

Numerous critiques have been made of the liberal feminist position. Essentially these critiques point to the failure of this position to criticize the power relations of male dominance inherent in the patriarchal structures of society, as well as its elitist assumption regarding equal access for women that ignores other mitigating factors such as race and economic class (Weiler, 1988). Yet it is important to recognize, as Sandra Acker (1987) states, that "the discourse of equal opportunity, however flawed, is virtually the only one acceptable to the general public" (p. 423). With specific reference to education she states: "Terms, like sexism, oppression and patriarchy are staples of feminist writing, but official documents and projects still employ them gingerly or not at all" (p. 423).

It is true that we did raise a few questions concerning the students' views of equality that touched "gingerly" on aspects of sexism and patriarchy. Nevertheless, the way our questions were generally phrased such as "Do you think girls are treated equally to boys?" "Should women be allowed to go to war?" seems to have encouraged the students to continue thinking about

equality as being able to do what men can do. What could have been an alternative approach?

A fascinating thing happened in this regard. In sharing my thoughts with Maria on a different approach I told her that first of all I had come to dislike intensely the very word equality. She replied that a friend and herself, in discussing their own situation as single women, had come to the same conclusion the evening before. I rejected the word equality because it naturally led to an equals sign - equals to someone or something. Instantly one is into a comparison instead of looking at oneself. She agreed, pointing out that beside the dangers of comparison the equal sign didn't really indicate equality at all. Rather it pointed to an implied hierarchy of one side of the equation as superior to the other as in "women want to be equal to men." Stressing the notion of equality never allows the question of how or what women might really want as women. It also offers no incentive to men to question the status quo.

We returned to our Christian belief on the idea of equality stemming from our dignity as human persons. The starting point should not be equality but dignity. Placing emphasis on the dignity of each human person leads to the non-competitive, non-comparative question "What is it that I must do to foster and live out my full dignity as a human person?" If, for example, I had begun with that question or a similar one regarding the combat topic it might have encouraged both girls and boys to approach violence from a different perspective.

In any case, this kind of approach allows all the students to address the same question together. It might be answered differently for girls and boys, differently among boys, differently among girls, but at least the starting point of human dignity points to, albeit lightly, the idea of a "new" world where "there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female,

but all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galations 3, 28-29). An ideal vision perhaps, but one well worth keeping in mind as we struggle with less dignified ways of considering equality.

CHAPTER SIX

GOING OUT WITH SMART GIRLS

Introduction

> When Claudia is attempting to get her Mom to sign the contract (allowing Claudia to take Math classes on Saturdays) her Mom states: "Boys don't like it if you're too smart."
>
> To which Claudia replies: "Mom, I'm doing this so I don't have to depend on some dumb guy all my life."
>
> Comment on these two statements. Agree? Disagree? Why? Why Not?
> Why do you think Claudia's mother signed the form?

The above assignment was given to the students as part of a number of discussion questions relating to the film Stand and Deliver which they watched as a class. This film relates the story of a teacher who despite many odds managed to get his students, viewed as losers by themselves, parents and other teachers, to pass a difficult nationwide Math test. The film provided an excellent opportunity for the students to reflect on the many images they either have of themselves or that other people have of them. One of these images was that of the "smart girl." It was an interesting image for the students since it was tied into boy-girl relationships, one of their favorite topics.

Maria and I explored the "smart girl" image in three ways. One way was by reflecting on written responses to the assignment questions like those at the beginning of this chapter. The second way was by noting verbal student responses describing their own experiences of going out with each other. The third way was through reflection on the influence of this image on ourselves as adults.

Responses to Claudia and Her Mother

Although there was no explicit statement made in the film Stand and Deliver, it was obvious that Claudia's mother did not see education as a priority for her daughter. She was fearful that if her daughter were too smart she would not be an acceptable marriage partner. Her fear accounts for her initial reluctance to sign the contract allowing Claudia to spend a great deal of her time studying.

There were differing responses to the conversation in the film between Claudia and her mother. However, regardless of whether a girl or a boy felt that the question of smartness was or was not the issue, a few common threads in their responses were noteworthy. These threads were noticeable particularly with respect to the idea of independence and the reasons the students gave for why they thought Claudia's mother eventually signed the contract. It also appeared as if girls were more aware of the "dangers" of being smart in terms of relationships.

In response to the first assignment question a few boys wrote that boys do not like smart girls. Their statements include:

> The reason why guys don't like girls that are really smart is that they don't like to have a girl do something better than them.

> The boys wouldn't like it if the girls are smarter because they feel less superior.

The majority of the boys, however, indicated that they wanted females to be smart. The reason given - so that they wouldn't have to depend on men. Some representative statements reflect this reason:

> Guys don't always go for somebody who is stupid because if you get married he will not always want to fork out his money to you.

> Because women shouldn't have to depend on men.

The boys also surmised that girls want to be smart for the same reason - she wants her own career. She wants to support herself and not depend on anyone. Girls have become more job-minded these days to support themselves especially if they're single mothers. Two boys connected smartness to relationship:

> The girl can help you do things and help you plan things.

> I disagree with the statement boys don't like smart girls. We need people to talk to not someone who doesn't understand anything we say.

It's interesting to note in these last two statements an unquestioning assumption that boys are smart. This assumption was a common one among the boys. Their statements, some of which are also recorded later, seemed to indicate that they either thought they <u>were</u> smart or that they were expected to <u>seem</u> smarter than girls. In terms of actual ability in class Maria stated that there was a fairly even distribution between the girls and boys evident in the quality of assignments and marks.

With respect to the girls, three of them felt that the question of their smartness was not an issue for boys:

> I disagree, guys like you the way you are not how smart you are.

> guys don't care if you are smart or not, they just care about you. Unless their (they're) jealous.

> guys like you intelligent they don't want some bozo as a girl-friend, at least the good guys don't.

It is intriguing to note that in contrast to the boys the girls generally related the issue of smartness to relationships. Only one girl stated when answering the first question:

> Every girl should make money or get an education so they won't have to depend on guys.

The girls also recognized that certain factors affect their responses. These included things like jealousy or what kind of boy one is thinking about. In contrast to the boys, the majority of the girls felt that being smart was a threat to boys. They commented:

> I agree all the way. They (girls) have great capabilities to make it big in the world but because of how boys look at them, they may not have the chance.

> If they are too smart the girls will never get married or even date.

> Boys don't like it if you are too smart.

While girls did not refer to the issue of independence when responding to the first statement: "Boys do not like it if you are smart;" nevertheless, they focused on independence as a major issue when offering reasons for the fact that Claudia's mother finally signed the contract. Almost every girl thought that the mother was reminded of her own dependence by her daughter's statement, "so I don't have to depend on some dumb guy all my life." The students pointed out that the mother regretted her situation and wanted something different for her daughter. They stated:

> Maybe her mother is one of those women that depends on her husband to support her and her family. I think her mother wanted better for her daughter.

> I think Claudia's mom signed because of past experiences of her own. She is afraid Claudia might take after herself.

> I think Claudia's mom had been dependent on guys all her life and hated it (but didn't show it) and didn't want Claudia to go through what she did.

The majority of the boys did not respond in much detail to the question of Claudia's mother signing the contract. They only made brief statements such as the following:

> To get Claudia out of her hair.
>
> Maybe she thought Claudia was doing the right thing.
>
> She saw how much Claudia wanted this opportunity.

Only two boys linked the signing of the contract to the mother's situation:

> Chances are that Claudia's mother did have to depend on some guy to carry her.
>
> Because she probably wants the best for her and doesn't want her to be a prostitute also. (There was no evidence of prostitution in the film.)

Perhaps the girls answered in a more situational manner because they had been presented with a mother-daughter scene. If the scene had been that of a father-son where the father had career problems because of a lack of education, the boys might have related in a similar personal manner. Since the majority of the girls answered the questions about Claudia's mother so fully, I wondered if they were thinking about their own mothers. Do they sense in their own mothers a regret for having to be financially dependent on men? Two girls referred to the idea that Claudia might end up getting divorced. They thought this idea had caused the mother to sign the contract so that her daughter could be independent if such an event occurred. Were these two girls speaking about a real life situation? Maria believed that the girls often spoke about real life situations since she was aware of many of their family backgrounds.

In reflecting about the reasons given for Claudia's response to her mother, Maria and I realized that smartness was frequently related to

independence by both girls and boys. However, independence carried a different "cost factor." For boys who approve of smart girls the approval stems from not wishing to be responsible to "fork out money" on girls. For girls smartness is essential because it is seen as a way of being independent - free from having to depend on the one who "forks out" the money. Independence may be either freely chosen or forced upon them. In microcosm these young people may have expressed the fears of many men and women today with respect to responsibility and mutual support of each other.

Redirecting the Question

The students' written responses to the issue of dating and smart girls in the film Stand and Deliver provided an opportunity for individual reflection (it was a homework assignment). Furthermore, by focusing on Claudia and her mother the issue could be regarded as an issue "out there." The situation could be treated like someone else's dilemma, even though many of the responses referred to above reflected personal beliefs.

As a pedagogical approach, I believe Maria's idea of introducing a discussion on dating and smart girls first of all as an "out there" issue was a helpful one for these young people. They could freely explore a topic without actually having to directly own up to their own personal experiences. To ask students directly about their own feelings on this topic is a more sensitive approach. It calls for a real trust between teacher and students and a recognition from a teacher that there is sufficient openness among students for a topic to be explored safely and honestly. I felt these qualities of trust and openness were present in Maria's classroom as she proceeded to redirect the

question of smartness and dating away from Claudia and her mother to the students' own experiences.

The day Maria asked the students if they believed, based on their own experience, that boys were comfortable dating smart girls I went home and wrote in my notes: "The discussion today was wild and exciting." It was obviously a topic close to home. When the question was first asked there was a moment of silence and bit of giggling. Most of the boys indicated by word or gesture that it didn't matter and several girls agreed with them. Then one boy said it was okay for girls to be smart "as long as they didn't brag about it." This comment was greeted with laughter by most of the students but I also remember clearly that Maria affirmed him for his honesty and her affirmation seemed to clear the way for the students to step out of the "acceptable" response. This same kind of acceptance was also given by Maria when another boy said "Well, I think boys should feel superior to girls." While there were groans from the class Maria again made him feel that it was good to express his feelings.

As the boys had been making their statements saying it didn't matter much if girls were smart or not, I noticed that many of the girls were mumbling among themselves and making faces. I wondered if they believed the boys and decided to find out. I asked the class: "Am I reading this right? The boys are saying they don't mind, but most of the girls are not really convinced?" My question unleashed a torrent of responses from both girls and boys and Maria had to work hard to get them to listen to each other.

Basically, the girls ended up accusing the boys of dishonesty. The boys responded with great laughter and admitted they had been giving the appropriate response rather than owning up to what they really felt about the matter. Towards the end of the class, as things settled down, one girl spoke about "the historical situation" in which men had always been seen as "first."

Consequently it was difficult for women to be recognized as smart. Although she did not articulate the idea that smart women are a threat to men remaining "first," I think it is fair to say that one can read this implication in her statements.

In response to this girl some boys insisted that things were changing now. However, one boy interjected saying: "Well Adam was created first." Nobody reacted to his statement. Maria and I looked at each other incredulously. We discussed his statement after class. Our comments are included later in this chapter.

Since there had been so many comments made at the same time in this class I asked Maria if she would get a couple of girls and boys respectively to respond to the topic. I felt this would help me read the situation better. She felt it would be good for all the students to write something when they were in a calmer mood. She invited me to write out the question myself which I did in the following manner:

> I really enjoyed your discussion the other day on the relationship between girls and boys. I would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions for me.
>
> I have chosen some statements that were made in class and am asking you to make further comments on them. (Other questions were posed at the same time.) "Boys are comfortable with smart girls." What do you think about this statement?

The following statements are taken from those students who volunteered to give their responses to me:

> Boy: I think this is true because the relationship is not based on how smart he or she is, it's about how much each cares about one another. If a boy feels uncomfortable with a smart girl, I think they are not right for each other.
>
> Boy: I disagree with the statement. I think boys are uncomfortable with smart girls because some guys feel that the girl will think that they are stupid and smart

girls' language sometimes sounds more intelligent.

Girl: I think this statement is true only with boys that are not afraid to say that they are not intimidated by smart girls or who do not care whether the person is smarter or just as smart as themselves. Some boys (I think) can be or are comfortable with any girl, smartness being unimportant.

Girl: I think this question has nothing to do with me, I think it would have to depend on the boy and his beliefs, not mine. Although, talking with male friends of mine, I would say now-a-days boys are comfortable with smart girls.

While these responses reflect diversity among boys and among girls as well as between boys and girls, it is interesting to note that when the question was redirected to them on a personal basis the issue shifted from independence (noted in discussion on film) to a concern for relationships. The fact remains. Given either connection, independence or relationships, what does the "going out with the smart girl" question really imply?

Questioning the Question

As noted briefly above, the stress on the smart girl as being necessary for independence from relationships had emerged in the discussion on the film. In contrast, when the question was redirected to the student's personal experience the issue of smartness in girls was deeply tied to relationships. A tension was expressed between recognizing that smartness in girls shouldn't be an obstacle for entering into a relationship with boys, yet at the same time admitting honestly that it often still remained problematic.

Boys generally found it difficult to admit that they could be intimidated by smart girls. Girls were willing to recognize that while certain boys were not threatened, at the same time they were very aware that being smart, because it was often threatening "to the male ego" as one girl put it, could be held against

them. What was most noticeable about this whole discussion when Maria and I reflected on it later was the fact that no student, or we as teachers, asked the question in reverse. Are girls comfortable with smart boys? The "absence" of this question is referred to in the concluding section of this chapter.

A fascinating student comment was made in class one day which allowed us to explore this question further of whether boys are comfortable relating to smart girls. The issue of racism was raised in reference to the same film, Stand and Deliver. Maria asked if anyone had experienced racism personally. We were quite amazed when one girl put up her hand and said: "I have been discriminated against because I am blond and blonds are seen as dumb." Quite a discussion followed her remark regarding the way media portrays blond women. There was a real awareness in the class that the media still portrays female blonds as "bimbos - no intelligence." It was noted that boys with blond hair are not judged the same way.

Related to this discussion about female blonds Maria and I wondered about the kinds of women that students might respond to in the media. One of the questions we asked the students to write about along with the "going out with smart girls" question was the following:

> Think of your favorite book, song, movie or T.V. program. Describe one woman portrayed there. Do you like her or not?

Half of the boys chose Claire Huckstable (Cosby Show). They liked her for the following reasons:

> She is a working mother and she doesn't stay at home.
>
> Even though she is female she works outside of the home.
>
> She's a lot like my mum (mother and works outside the home).

She's a responsible mother and lawyer.

In a similar vein Rebecca from the T.V. show Cheers was chosen because she was seen to have "as much power" as Sam. Only one boy chose a sex symbol image:

> The woman in Mission Impossible. While all the men are designing the plan for the mission she is sent to attract the "bad guy."

Generally the boys' favorite female images were consistent with why they thought men wanted smart women - women who can be economically independent. Underlying this reason one can imply that just as equality equals being able to do what men can do so smartness is equated with proving that women are capable of being as smart as men. This belief was brought home very strongly to us when we looked at their responses to a question concerning their own image of themselves. This question was again related to the film Stand and Deliver and the students responded to it before answering the questions on Claudia and her mother. The question was:

> What kind of image do you think you give? Do you like your image or would you like to change it?

What really amazed me, although maybe it shouldn't have, in reading their responses was the fact that almost all the boys made strong confident statements regarding their own smartness. At the very least they wished to be regarded as smart. Here are some representative statements:

> I can do things on my own without any help.
> I think I give an average intelligent image.
> I think I give a smart and athletic image.
> I try to look like a normal person and be smart.
> I'm the smartest guy in grade nine.

It was very evident from their statements then and discussions in class that the question of smart girls was generally judged from the perspective of imaging themselves as smart or at least wishing to be imaged that way.

The girls' responses about their favorite female images were much more diverse than the boys. Two girls chose Angela Bower (Who's the Boss?). It had been noted in the verbal discussion on blonds that Angela was not a true blond because she dyes her hair. These girls gave the same reasons for liking Angela Bower as the boys did for liking Claire Huckstable:

> I really like her character. She portrays a hard working successful woman. She runs her company well, if not better than a man could.
>
> - owns own agency, is very smart.

Likewise one girl liked Kate Tanner (Alf):

> - works, raises three children and an alien.

However, a number of girls liked women for other reasons such as:

> She is strong and stands up for her rights and beliefs (Earthseed).
>
> She was paralyzed, sued the state because the police didn't assist her (battered woman in Cry for Help).

Several girls commented on women they didn't like:

> Abby Ewing (Dallas). She hurts other people to get ahead.
>
> Rich "know it all" who acts feminine and helpless (reference to a song).

Only one girl referred to the traditional sex symbol status of the blond female. She even identified her own image with her.

> In the movie "Oklahoma" I liked this girl who had blond hair, pretty, nice, played "hard to get" when it came to guys. Yes, I liked her because she reminded me of what I'll be in a couple of years.

How were the girls' media images related to the image of themselves? Did they attach any significance to the value of being smart when asked about their own image of themselves? When I read their responses I felt that there were only tenuous links to the women they had referred to in the media and their own image of themselves. Rather I had a strong sense that, apart from one girl referred to above, they had put these media images of women that they either admired or objected to aside. Instead they had hesitatingly begun with themselves and what they felt was important.

A consistent response to "What kind of image do you give?" was that they hoped that their image was one of relationship to others. It should be noted that not one boy referred to anyone else in speaking about their own image. Here are some representative statements from the girls. The first statement is particularly poignant for me in noting the hesitancy. I think this same hesitant wish can be detected in some of the other comments:

> I don't really know what kind of image I give off. I would have to be someone else looking in at myself to know the image I have. But I would like to have the image of someone who is nice, someone who everyone likes for themselves.
>
> A quite good mature image to the grade 7's.
>
> I think I'm satisfied with the image I give. An achieving responsible person.
>
> I think I give an image of someone who cares about other people.
>
> As in changing my image I'd like to do that and become the person that I'm among my friends.
>
> I don't know. Yes, I would like to change it.
>
> I think I give sometimes a stuck up impression, but I try to portray myself as warm and caring.

Even though a few girls referred to their intellectual ability as part of their imaging of themselves, it was quite obvious that the smart girl image was not a central one for them. The image only meant something when it was attached to the idea of going out with boys.

It should be noted that the phrase "going out with" is significant in terms of the smartness issue. Maria noted that the boys were quite content to have a smart girl in their group to help out with a class assignment. Also there did not seem to be any great competition between boys and girls for marks. It was only when the conversation turned to dating or relating to a girl as a special friend that smartness in girls was seen as problematic. Of course the assignment question stated at the beginning of this chapter, as well as Maria's question, could have directed the conversation that way. Yet, there were opportunities for other examples of relating that could have been included in their class discussion and written responses.

I suspect that the idea of "going out with" in the sense described here is closely connected to the image boys and girls wish to portray of themselves. For boys, the image of their own smartness is important in terms of a certain kind of relating to girls. For girls, the image of smartness in the same relational circumstance is an image "out there" as it were. Something that others may or may not want you to be. Again, as in the case of equality, smartness ends up residing in how it is measured in importance by males. In other words, when the girls are imaging themselves vis a vis the boys they need to ask the question of what it means to be imaged as smart. When they are looking at themselves there are other images that they hope they have or wish for.

Our reflections on the students' responses to the questions posed above led us to some valuable insights for future teaching, insights which are noted in the concluding section of this chapter. Their responses also led to Maria and

myself having a number of conversations with respect to our own image. Some of our reflections are recorded in the following section. They are important for us since they help us realize what we bring as persons to the teaching process.

Reflecting on the Smart Girl Image for Ourselves as Adults

The many discussions that took place on this topic with the students motivated Maria and myself to wonder if the smart girl image affected us as women. Our reflections, which are shared here, centered in on our professional life as teachers.

We recognized first the glaring fact that the majority of teachers are female. Yet the majority of administrators are male. I hardly need make any comments about our Church. We wondered if this situation indicated that women are seen as less capable than men of being in leadership roles? Related to this question we also talked about the "sweet image" of the elementary teacher. Where did our image fit?

With regard to the issue of male administrators I shared with Maria the difficulties women had in the past being recognized as capable of being smart because of the fact that they were women. Rooted in the Darwinian theory of sexual divergence men like Edward Clark, a medical doctor from Harvard, postulated a common belief held in his time (late nineteenth century). He held, among other things, that consonant with women's place being in the home there were innate distinctive masculine and feminine characteristics which suited men and women respectively for the public and private domains. He cautioned that women would be in danger of becoming masculinized by receiving identical education (Beyond Separate Spheres, 1982).

Rosenberg, the author of this book, relates numerous studies that women undertook to dispel the above mentioned belief. From our point of view today we would probably say these studies were successful. Hopefully, Dr. Clark would never get away with such a statement today. Yet Rosenberg points out in her book that Dr. Clark's theory may have been insisted on more from a fear of women competing with men for jobs than any real belief in biological differences.

It is this latter fear that we see expressed today in our profession with respect to administration. As women are beginning to become administrators we hear certain statements being made by men such as: "I probably won't get the job because they will have to give it to a woman." This does not mean to say there isn't still a lot of confidence in men that they are more likely to expect to receive an administrative appointment. There is an ominous implication in the statement referred to, however, that a woman might get a position not because she is smart enough but because a company has to have a good track record with respect to equal opportunity for males and females. Media images of business women tend to further the idea that women have achieved success not because they are smart but because they carry the right deodorant in their briefcases.

The fear of not being recognized on one's own merits is being resisted by many women today such as Maria and myself who do not want to be given a position just to make an organization look good. This resistance is more important to Maria at the moment since she is considering a future leadership position. In fact she somewhat cynically questioned: "Are men prepared to accept us on our own merits?"

For myself, because I am already in an administrative position in religious education, I am learning to live with the fact that although I generally

feel that I am in this position because of my capabilities, at the same time I am well aware that many women like myself who work in the area of religious education or theology feel ourselves to be there by default. The default is a shortage of priests. Often women like myself find ourselves making statements such as the following: "We know we wouldn't be here if there were enough priests around."

Until I started reflecting about the smart girl image, I never realized one hidden implication, among others. In the Catholic church women are excluded from ordination and major decision making. Underneath the officially held theological beliefs, upholding exclusion of women, it is quite possible to detect beliefs about our capabilities.

However, it is also possible and more painful to realize that the disbelief about our capabilities as women is not the real issue. The real issue is often the fear that we may be smarter, at times, than men. Given the same opportunities, our intelligence becomes a real challenge to men's own images of themselves. For example, I must sadly note that a few women I know who have achieved "coveted" positions have been made to feel very keenly that they were a threat.

In our reflections then on this topic we realized, like the girls in grade nine, that being smart can be problematic in relationship to how males perceive us. From the girls' point of view it can affect whether boys might choose to go out with them. The choice will depend on whether smartness in girls makes boys uncomfortable with respect to their own image of themselves. Likewise, from our perspective as female teachers, smartness can be a problem for us when it places us in a competitive job position with males. Again, the issue of smartness becomes linked to the comfort or discomfort level of men. It is not so much a question of being smart but of being a threat.

Another insight on this topic arose out of our discussions on the "sweet image" of the elementary female teacher. Here the conversation shifted away from men's perspectives to our own as women imaging other women. Maria spoke out of her experience as having been an elementary teacher and of working in an elementary/junior high school. She spoke of "radically different women in elementary, junior and senior high school - very different. They (elementary female teachers) don't want to get involved in A.T.A. and things like that. These women are nice and everything but . . ." She herself had been seen that way when she was an elementary teacher even though she had always resisted being identified with the kind of behaviors such as "sweet" and "submissive" associated with women who taught young children.

In turn, I shared with Maria some of Madeleine Grumet's thoughts expressed in her book Bitter Milk. She states that because these teachers are working with young children they are easily identified with the mother role. In their role of mother extended into the classroom Grumet states that they have bought into patriarchy by handing over as it were the traditional role of the father to the male leader. I shall probably make some people very angry by stating this, but at times my experience of female elementary teachers concurs with Grumet's hypothesis. They often appear submissive and uncritical. This is most noticeable where there is an all female staff with the exception of the two male administrators.

Maria made an interesting comment when I shared the above information. In trying to express the "radical difference" she felt between elementary teachers and others she stated:

> I don't know what it is - whether it is because you are teaching older children who no longer accept you in the parent role. Once you get into junior high you are faced with a group of kinds that are no longer willing

> to buy the parent-child roles and perhaps it (parental roles) breaks down.

While this whole discussion between Maria and me might seem removed from the students' comments on the smart girl image, I believe there is a strong connection. Because of our conversation we realized that the idea of being smart had always been associated by both girls and boys with being capable of working outside of the home. This association was expressed in the female media images chosen as well as their stress on economic independence. No one had imaged or described a smart mother unless she worked outside of the home.

Failure to connect smartness to the parenting role, I believe, is very problematic for certain women's image of themselves. There is, for example, in this failure a thinly veiled suggestion that women who work at home are not capable of doing anything else. Paradoxically this idea is best expressed in thinking about the way men who become "housemothers" are viewed. A notable media image is that of Tony in "Who's the Boss?." The impression given is that he is "doing time" as a house mother until he completes his college degree. Given this image it is no wonder that women, such as elementary female teachers, have most easily, as Maria put it: "bought into it (the myth of not being capable), they feel powerless." She pointed out that even in her own case as a junior high teacher and as a fairly independent person she was still only learning to question: "the principal walks in and they (elementary teachers) don't question and I still have trouble doing that."

Furthermore, associating smartness as a quality that is expressed outside of the home tends to devalue those qualities traditionally associated with the home, with females, such as caring. When the grade nine girls described their own images of themselves they emphasized the importance of

being viewed as "someone who cared." Likewise elementary female teachers frequently refer to themselves as "caring about children," - language less frequently heard as one "advances" into high school. Even though from a Christian perspective caring for children is considered a priority, it is not likely to be high on the list for evaluating if one is "smart" enough to be an administrator.

From our reflections on the students' responses and our own experiences we began to see that there could have been some other ways of dealing with the questions derived from the film Stand and Deliver. Some of these way are reflected on in the following section.

Concluding Insights for Religious Education

As the theme of smartness took shape in written form I began to realize that, like the previous theme "Equality Equals?", the approach that had been taken in class had once again allowed the male perspective to be highlighted by the very formation of the key question assigned "Are boys uncomfortable . . ." Rather than "interrupting patriarchy" (Magda Lewis, 1990) patriarchy had been reinforced by emphasizing the fact that females need to worry about their image vis a vis males.

In recognizing this reinforcement the thought that came to mind immediately was whether or not the question to the students should have also been reversed: "Are girls uncomfortable . . ." This question would have at least focused on the girls. It might have encouraged their voice to be heard in terms of what they expected from boys. At the same time I wondered what specific Christian perspective could have been shared with the students that would have encouraged them to resist or at least identify the notion of assumed male superiority hidden in the assignment question.

In discussing the idea of reversing the question with Maria her first reaction was that the reversal would have been difficult since the students would have promptly laughed at what they would have promptly seen as a "non question." We then explored the possibility of pursuing with grade nine students the idea of why one might consider some questions as "non questions." Maria and I both felt that it would have been valuable for the students to have first raised the "non question" and then have the students engage in the following reflections:

> Why does the question in reverse make us laugh?
> What are we saying about males and females when we ask the question posed in the assignment?
> Are we making a different statement when we reverse the question?

While Maria stated that it "takes a very long time to see this" (implications of the "non question") we both agreed that one of the ways to assist ourselves and our students to resist the questions posed to us is to first learn to explore the "absence" of the question. As Maria Harris (1988) states in reference to Eliot Eisner's concept of the null curriculum, "If we do not know about something, or do not realize what is addressed can be understood in another manner or seen through another lens, it skews our viewpoint; it limits options; it clouds our perspective" (p. 20). Our exploration then of the "non question" could have been a first step towards encouraging the female students to resist having to image themselves from the male vantage point.

From a specific Christian perspective what could we have included that would also have opened the students' eyes to other perspectives on female/male relationships? We remembered the isolated statement made by one boy, mentioned earlier, as a justification of wanting to be seen as smarter than girls: "Well Adam was created first." The comment had been left to hang

there with neither affirmation or challenge. Could Maria have picked up on this comment and asked what it meant for Adam to be created first? Did this mean Eve was not as smart as Adam?

At the time of the boy's comment, I suggested to Maria that it might be worthwhile for the students to review the biblical story of Creation. From our own readings and discussions on feminist biblical scholarship (Collins, 1985; Russell, 1985) we realized how often the book of Genesis and other parts of the Bible had been incorrectly used to assert male superiority over women. This assertion easily justified the idea that women were not so smart as men.

While contemporary Christian teaching in our Catholic experience does not uphold this view, at least not explicitly any more, we often felt from comments the students made, similar to the one about Adam, that they still "knew" that the Bible did assert male supremacy. Consequently, our pedagogical question became how can we show that the Christian tradition is based on beliefs about females and males being imaged in the likeness of God and not of each other? How can we highlight the fact that beginning with the Genesis story and moving through the whole Bible the intentions of God for human relationships are those of mutuality and not dominance (Soelle, 1984; Trible, 1978)? I felt that if we could translate these questions into some positive curriculum content it would be possible for the students to see that the underlying currents running through the topic of smartness such as superiority, threat, fear of interdependence, and a devaluation of the domestic role could be challenged. Perhaps caring would have been seen as more valuable than being smart, something that the girls had affirmed when reflecting on their own image of themselves.

These questions did not become entirely translated into any specific content in the classroom during my research time. The reason for this was

partly related to time. Another reason also related to the fact that we ourselves were struggling to see biblical sources with new eyes. Did we really believe it was possible to present Christian teaching in a positive light in terms of the questions posed above? Essentially we would answer affirmatively to this question yet it was still a struggle to know how to uncover the layers of meaning surrounding the Biblical texts that we had been immersed in ourselves for many years.

Our struggles relating to the two themes of equality and smartness led Maria to purposefully form an approach to the Bible which would recognize the patriarchal bias in the text, as well as in interpretation, and yet also help the students to see that there is a corrective principle within the text itself. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983) points out that the corrective principle is that of focusing on women as historical participants in patriarchal biblical history and in the development of Christian faith. She states: "Feminist analysis and consciousness raising enables one to see the world and human lives, as well as the Bible and tradition in a different light with different 'glasses' " (1984, p. 32). Helping the students to see the Bible with different glasses, which we discovered was not an easy task, is explored in the next two themes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

COULD JESUS BE A GIRL?

Introduction

The title of this theme was taken from a question one of the girls asked when Maria was trying to find out what part the students would like to play in the video program they were going to make on "The Woman taken in Adultery" (John 8:3-11). I suggested the idea of making a video since I was fortunate to have someone who could help us produce it at a reasonable cost. Both Maria and I felt that the involvement of all the students in this visual presentation of the gospel story did offer an important learning experience for the students. The video itself will be discussed in the next chapter. Up to this point the class had been fairly orderly as students either said what part they would like to play or suggested other people for parts. Catherine's question "Could Jesus be a girl?" occurred in this context and led to an astonishing eruption of emotional outbursts from the boys. There was an immediate chorus of comments from them indicating that the idea of Jesus being a girl was too much to take. I heard one boy say above the shouts of disapproval: "Come on, this is going too far. He was a male." Another boy protested: "You're just jealous" (that Jesus was a man).

It became evident to me that claiming Jesus as male was being treated as an important victory for the boys. The girls were silent during this whole time except for a few groans. I wondered what they were thinking. I remember feeling silenced myself, realizing that the maleness of Jesus was being used against the girls almost like a weapon over them - over me.

As Elizabeth Johnson (1991) so aptly states: "In a naive sexist theology, Jesus' maleness has been so interpreted that he has become the male revealer of a male God whose representations can only be male" (p. 235). Right before our eyes this claim on representation was being played out. I remember my feelings: it hurt.

Some of the statements were so negative in words and tone that Maria deviated from her usual acceptance of student comments and interrupted one boy saying: "That doesn't have to be said in a negative tone." Yet even as she said it a few boys immediately began to plan their strategy by saying: "Write down James (grade nine boy) for Jesus." The strategy was whispered around to the other boys in the class and it was the first time that we witnessed total male bonding of the boys on any issue.

Male bonding around the issue of the maleness of Jesus was another clear indication to Maria and myself that maleness attributed to God can make a difference in the way in which we humans are valued as males, as females. This difference has already been articulated in the review of literature section, Chapter Four. We also learned, as we got further into this topic, that as teachers we were wandering into fairly complicated theological territory with respect to the Catholic doctrines of God as Father, God as Spirit, Jesus as Son, Mary as Mother.

Questioning Tradition

The reaction related above, which will be referred to again in this chapter, took place in the latter part of the year of my research visits. Much earlier in the year when the students had been discussing whether or not women were equal to men (cf. Equality Equals?), one girl suddenly said, "Why

didn't Jesus come as a girl?" It was not often that students made specifically religious links to a topic unless the teacher or myself initiated such a link. However, isolated comments such as this one that popped up now and again made us realize that our feminist perspective focus would now and again cause some students to raise a question based on their previous religious education background. The students were like us. There seemed to be a need to wonder about the way we had been taught our tradition.

A poignant example of this wondering for me was when, after class one day, one of the girls asked if it were true that God punished Eve by pain in childbirth. Her comment made me think about how often the Adam and Eve story comes back to haunt us. The girl's question made me think of a similar question raised by Dorothy Soelleee (1984). In her reflections on the Adam and Eve story she asked: "What kind of God is that, whose major interests have to be described in these terms?" (p. 97). These Genesis story "terms" appear to describe God as unfairly testing and punishing Adam and Eve.

I asked the student if she knew that the story of creation was written long after the origins of the world. She said she did. I told her that at the time of the writing people, especially women, were keenly aware of the difficulties associated with childbirth. People tended to see pain as a punishment from God. It took them a long time not to blame God for the human condition. I should have added that many people still assume that adversity is God's way of pointing out that their lives are on the wrong track and asked her how such a belief shapes our human image of God. For me, the belief that God sends adversity to punish is a rather convenient way of avoiding the fact that our lifestyles are interdependent. The young girl seemed to accept my response but it made me aware of some of the complexity of answering questions about the tradition. Such complexity is expanded on later in this chapter.

To return to Catherine's question and Maria's response, it was interesting to note that the conversation encouraged other related questions. Maria's response was that the culture of Jesus' time would not have made it possible for him to come as a girl "since women would not have been accepted as worthy of being heard." As she said this I wondered if there would ever be such a culture. Maria also went on to say that "Jesus was very radical with respect to his relationship with women of his day." She suggested that it was good that he was a man since he could teach others to see women differently.

For some reason her explanation triggered the following question, again from a girl: "Do you believe in the King James version of the Bible where it says, "he", "he" all the time?" Maria responded by saying that some modern translations of the Bible were attempting to use inclusive language. She said: "After all God was not a human being so was neither He nor She." I enjoyed the fact that a moment later one of the girls in speaking about God said: "Well didn't He" - then she corrected herself and said: "Well didn't God . . ."

After class Maria and I talked about pursuing directly the naming of God using female nouns and imagery. A small beginning was made in this direction by raising a question with respect to using Mother as well as Father for God.

Calling God Mother

The idea of calling God "Mother" was raised through the following question:

> Imagine that you are in a Church and you hear someone saying that we should call God Mother as well as Father. How would you react?

The students answered this question in written form for homework and their responses were later discussed in class. I also returned to their responses at

the end of the year, several months later, when I had an opportunity to speak to the girls and boys separately.

Some of their written responses are given below. One can sense, I believe, from both girls and boys an openness to the idea of calling God "Mother", yet a realization that they have been taught that God is Father and, therefore, by implication male, although most students when questioned felt that they could call on their belief in God as Spirit as a way of extricating God from being either male or female.

> Girl: I would say, what do you mean, he is a man but maybe he portrays people. I guess he could be a woman. (I underline "he" to indicate that the pronoun 'she' was never used by a student even when there was a recognition that God could be called Mother as well as Father.)
>
> Girl: I really don't know. We could call him whatever we want. Maybe we can find out when we go to heaven. Single parents act as a mother and father, so God could be both.
>
> Girl: I would strongly agree, because no one knows for sure if God is a girl or a boy.
>
> Girl: I think my eyebrows would rise, because since I was small you're taught to call God Father.
>
> Girl: I would strongly disagree. It would sound as if this person was trying to change the Bible. It states clearly that God is our Father and Mary is our Mother.
>
> Boy: I would agree with this person, because if you say God was just Father that would be stereotyping.
>
> Boy: No, because he said he was a man.
>
> Boy: It would make no difference to me because God is God.
>
> Boy: I would think this is fair because women are part of this world too.

> Boy: We are brought up as God being given many qualities, but if he is a spirit should he be labelled a sex male/female? It would be a change that I could get used to.
>
> Boy: Ever since I knew about God I've known him as a man. Every day you learn a new thing and so I think I would be a bit surprised.

It was interesting to note that those students who expressed openness to the idea of God being called Mother generally said that it really didn't make any difference what God was called. For example, they saw no connection between the "absence" of women in religion and the way God was named. Maria pointed out to me that it was not likely they would note any connection, since the majority of the students were not church goers. Consequently they had little exposure to any kind of God language. She also felt that for those students who did attend Church their local parish was so big with hardly any opportunity for involvement of youth, the Sunday Liturgy made little impact on their consciousness at all. Women like Maria and myself feel the pain of our "absence" because ironically we choose to be present and somewhat involved in church life. It was important for us to remember throughout this study that our situation was not that of the majority of the students.

Two boys, however, as quoted above, did make such a connection by noting that it could be stereotyping to call God male and also that referring to God as Mother was a recognition that "women are part of this world." In their own way these two boys were recognizing that the way we name God connects to the way we value ourselves. This same recognition is stated by many feminists (Daly, 1973; Ruether, 1983; Spender, 1980) and was something that Maria and I talked about many times.

A very articulate girl noted the connection and resisted it quite vigorously. Maria and I have heard versions of this response many times.

> If I were in Church and heard someone saying that we should call God Mother as well as Father, I would say that the comment was made by a woman and that her logic and reasoning are wrong. She is pushing her equal rights too far. Because God is a spirit, she doesn't have to compete with him. Women in men's positions in most cases is acceptable, but to say it is alright to accept women as priests, which is what this person is saying, is wrong because it is not the way God intended it to be . . . . If it was not to be this way I am sure he would have indicated it. God certainly was not chauvinistic.

Apart from surmising where this young girl had learnt the attitudes expressed in her response, it was quite intriguing to note her last comment: "God certainly was not chauvinistic." A similar comment was reiterated by another girl who stated: "I would think that person was wrong because I feel that was the way it was meant to be. There was no favoritism."

The belief that God was not chauvinistic of "Himself" was quite fascinating. It was a belief repeated several times in class discussions. On the one hand, the students constantly referred to the fact that the Bible said that God was "He", making such statements as: "But Jesus called God Father." Yet they often quickly added that this didn't mean that God was prejudiced in favor of males: "Didn't Jesus call God Father and he wasn't chauvinistic?"

Much later after this discussion had taken place I was deeply moved by reading a similar belief expressed in Maya Angelou's book, I know why the Caged Bird sings (1969). In it she wrote: "Of course, I knew God was white too, but no one could make me believe he was prejudiced" (p. 48). I wish I could have shared her statement with the students. They would have understood for I could sense in the students as well as in Maya Angelou the struggle to claim the tradition of naming God as male but not blame God for it. For example, at one point when the Bible was being used as a proof that God was referred to as "he" a few girls automatically said together: "Yes, but look who wrote the Bible?"

In reflecting on this topic of chauvinism and God, Maria offered an interesting insight with respect to connecting God and the world. While she agreed with me that it was good that students didn't put God in a negative light she felt this was partly due to the fact that many students didn't think of God as involved with their daily lives. She said that at least when people thought of God punishing them (reference to my conversation with a student on Eve and childbirth), they were assuming that God was a part of their lives. Maria expressed a significant issue I believe which has to be taken into account if students are to understand the significance of naming God in particular ways. As this whole discussion took place it became evident to Maria and myself that raising consciousness with respect to imaging God as other than male (or white) was complicated.

Theological Complexities

The day that the students got into the above noted references to the Bible a number of other Catholic doctrines were brought up that left Maria and myself wondering how the students could ever be led out of the maze of previous learnings to include even a glimmer of feminist consciousness as part of their faith perspective.

Moving on from biblical references to "He," questions and comments were raised indicating varying degrees of confusion with respect to female imagery for God and the way the students understood certain faith positions. First, confusion was expressed between distinguishing Jesus as God and, therefore, definitely male historically, and God as other than Jesus. One boy tried to answer this distinction rather neatly I thought for an adolescent: "God is God, the head hauncho. Jesus is the big Word."

The students' greatest difficulty, however, was linking the place of Mary, Jesus' Mother in all of this. At one point in the discussion I had, in an effort to resist the genderization of God as male, reminded the students that Jesus did not speak English and so did not directly use the word, Father. I wrote "Abba" on the board and said that was the word Jesus would have used since he spoke Aramaic. I told them that I had learned that Abba was an intimate word for how Jesus felt about God and so could imply a mother relationship as well as a father one. While they seemed quite intrigued by my comment, objections were raised such as the following: "If Mary is the mother of God and virgin, isn't God Father?" Her question led to other similar questions concerning the virginity of Mary.

I sat there aware of the difficulties surrounding their questions and wondered how on earth Maria was going to handle such a sensitive issue. They seemed to be quite accepting of her comment: "If we believe God created all things, why can't we believe he put a baby in Mary?" We admitted afterwards that there has to be a more meaningful way to approach this doctrine without resorting to the idea of it just being a miracle. We did not discover this way in our time together.

Later on when I met the boys separately we returned to the topic of Mary. The following conversation reinforces again the complexity of talking about this kind of topic with adolescents:

> Boy: But if God is called mother and Mary is a mother, then there is no Father?
>
> Myself: You are thinking about God as a man and Mary as a woman as you think about . . . (I was interrupted here).
>
> Boy: as a mortal or whatever
>
> Myself: Yes, as mortals bring forth a child. We are not talking about the same thing as with God and Mary.

> Mary received the gift of the Holy Spirit and in the Bible, in the Hebrew Testament, the word for Spirit is actually a female word.
>
> Few boys: Oh
>
> Boy: Was Mary the wife of God?
>
> Myself: No (interrupted by the next comment)
>
> Boy: She's just a virgin that got zapped! (Maria and I enjoyed his modern interpretation. There is hope for new imagery!)
>
> Boy: You know God can do anything and he made Mary pregnant without anything.

At this point in the conversation as I was desperately thinking how to respond to the students' comments the topic was mercifully changed by one of the boys back to a previous topic, the idea of women going into the army.

The difficulty of explaining complex doctrinal beliefs without seeming to reject them and yet at the same time challenge patriarchal notions of God hidden in them became very evident during these class discussions. Maria and I often went away from these sessions wondering how it was possible to help young people understand the complexity and grasp new possibilities. My separate discussion with the girls led me to a few insights.

As I read back to the girls their written responses regarding their idea of calling God Mother our conversation turned not to doctrine but to the difficulty of imaging God as female. One girl put it most clearly when she stated that she couldn't imagine a female God "with breasts, long hair." I said to her: "Yet you are the one that just gave such a beautiful description of the relationship between yourself and your mother and I thought as you were speaking, God could be like that." "I know," she said, "but - ." I hastened at this point to assure her that it was alright to stay with the "but." I wanted to be careful not to push her into saying something that wasn't authentic for her.

A number of girls expressed strong assent to this girl's difficulty. Their difficulty made me realize that the whole idea of calling God "Mother" was much more deeply rooted in imagery - imagining God to be - than in the actual naming itself. I thought of how long it took me to divest myself of an old man image of God, with white hair and a flowing beard to match.

However, there was some evidence in this discussion with the girls, maybe because of the kind of conversation that we had together, that other images could be envisioned. One girl who had insisted that God be named male because "she had always thought that way," suddenly said: "Stop, I've changed my mind" (referring to the idea that God could be understood in female terms). Several girls looked at her in amazement and one of them said to her: "When did you do that - how did you just change your mind like that?" The girl simply replied: "I just did - right now." One never knows how and why change occurs.

The other statement was made by a sad looking girl who rarely contributed in class. However, this topic seemed to interest her. At one point in the discussion we got on to the question of science and religion. One girl mentioned that she used to pray for rain but now that she knew how weather patterns worked she wondered about God. I told her that I had always thought of the world as a wonderful surprise wrapped up by God that we were always unwrapping to see what was in it. Suddenly this sad looking girl smiled and said: "I think God is a surprise." I felt she had taken the discussion beyond the male/female debate, beyond the complexity of exploring doctrinal beliefs, to a place that offered a refreshing way to image God and the world of human relationships. Her statement echoed in a way the journey of both Maria and myself in searching for new ways to understand our Christian faith inclusive of a feminist perspective.

Questioning the "Male" God for Ourselves as Adults

Reflecting on the comments and questions of students as well as our own shaky responses to them led Maria and I to realize that we needed and wanted to further our own knowledge by reading feminist biblical and theological sources. As part of my studies I had done some course work in this area and was able to suggest some books (Collins, 1985; Russell, 1985; McFague, 1987; Trible, 1978) that we could draw from for our conversations.

It is important to state as an integral part of sharing some of our insights that our consciousness, unlike that of the students, of the naming of God as male and its implications for our lives was deeply felt. For example, we encountered this "male" God in a male led liturgy every time we went to church. In fact it was my experience at a liturgy that had caused me to form the question for this study (cf. Chapter One). The sharing of this experience with Maria had become the starting point for becoming partners-in-conversation for this research.

There were many times when we shared our frustrations at the imposition of the numerous "He's," and patriarchal images in the prayers, hymns, and homilies. Often we talked about the energy it required, not to mention the faith, to keep returning. Sometimes we admitted to each other that we avoided going, refused to sing, or shopped around for parishes where there was at least some sensitivity to "inclusive" language. I put the "inclusive" in quotation marks because, as mentioned already in Chapter Four, although our Church is slowly creeping towards naming women as well as men, sisters as well as brothers, humankind instead of mankind there is still strong resistance to any female referents for God. While I have on occasion heard a priest address God as:

"Father, Mother of us all," or, "God, Parent of us all," we both "know" that it would be absolutely taboo to use the pronoun "she" in official church liturgies.

In noting the absence of the "she" we do not intend to say that God should always be addressed in female terms or that "she" is any better than "he." Pointing to the absence of the "she", however, highlights for us the problematic presence of the "he." In this regard we discussed Thomas Groome's reference to the exclusive use of the "he" pronoun for God in such biblical statements as: "God made man in his image and likeness" (Genesis 1, 27). Groome states that while inclusiveness is embedded in the truth, nevertheless, women "must first pause and interpret whether or not this is so since they are not explicitly named." And the subconscious implication remains that, really, "man most reflects the Creator" (1991, p. 2).

As we were reading this last sentence and agreeing with Groome, Maria posed some challenging questions: "Where did we get our assumption from that we are included? When the Genesis text was written did the author mean to include women?" I told Maria that Phyllis Trible's book, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (1978), had been helpful for me since she goes back to the original language of the text for her interpretation. According to Trible the original creation of God, Adam (adam) is "a sexually undifferentiated earth creature . . . not a 'self-made' man, a patriarchal figure" (p. 88). The creation of Eve "brings about the reference to human sexuality and different words are used to speak of the man, 'is,' and the woman, 'issa' " (p. 95). The earth creature then does truly reflect the inclusiveness and mutuality of females and males.

I realized when responding to Maria that it was so crucial for teachers to have the opportunity to re-examine the Bible through the lens of feminist biblical scholarship. Of course this lens will not always yield an inclusive perspective on women. Trible has also written a powerful book Texts of Terror (1984) in

which she considers some painful experiences of women in the Bible. For her these stories remain in the text as an indication of what God does not wish to see repeated in history.

Many feminist theologians would suggest that we have fallen into the idolatry of presuming the maleness of God - a presumption which has had consequences for the way both humans and non-humans have related in our world (McFague, 1987). The idea of imaging God in a relational way to all of nature was an important one for Maria as she is passionately committed to respecting and conserving the environment. She has been influential in making me more aware of ecological issues. Because of her interest we talked about some of the concepts in the book Models of God (1987), in which the author Sally McFague states "The primary metaphors (such as King, both ruler, lord, master, etc.) are hierarchical, imperialistic, and dualistic stressing the distance between God and the world" (p. 19).

We did not have an opportunity to discuss McFague's work any further in which she explores imaging God in the relational terms of mother, friend, and lover. McFague calls for "theologians and students of religion" to both "deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional symbols of Christian faith" (p. 21). Her own work in this area has been most helpful for me, particularly her suggestion that it is possible "to recontextualize the dominant metaphor of father, in a parental rather than patriarchal direction" (p. 20).

At the time of writing this theme I have reclaimed to a certain degree the naming of God as Father in a non-patriarchal sense. I have learnt to be quite comfortable with the naming of God as Mother, even though I am more at home with other symbolic ways of naming God drawn from biblical sources and my own experiences. I am still hung up on the pronouns. I trip over my tongue constantly in order to avoid using "he" with respect to God. I tend to use "she"

not so much in a naming sense but as a political way of stating that God is not male. This fact, of course, should be obvious. Yet one wonders about the "obvious" when there is so much resistance to removing, even in a small way, male referents for God.

Maria stated that she did not dwell that much on male/female imagery for God since it was not important to her "to have a concrete image. If I had to draw an image of God it would be colors." She is also attracted to the image of God as portrayed in the lion image, Aslan, described in C.S. Lewis' book, The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (1950). (Maria's attraction to this image has been already noted in Chapter Four with respect to our discussion on a spirituality for administrators.) Although Aslan is a male lion she felt he embodied traditional female traits, especially in his relationship to the children who felt safe in his presence.

An important principle for both Maria and myself in our own search to name God is to ground our search in the Christian belief that God can never be completely described by any one name. We have, therefore, found it inspiring to remember the young girl's statement: "God is a surprise." The naming of God as surprise was reinforced for Maria in reading an article which she shared with me on the "unexpectedness" of God (Christian Duquois, 1983). The author reminds his readers that too often our images of God are based on our own expectations. He states: "God should no longer be imprisoned in the petty calculations imposed on him by Christianity's moral and anthropocentric interests" (p. 85). While I can take the author's advice to heart in thinking of my own image of God I remarked to Maria that interestingly the author himself was still imprisoned in the "him" pronoun.

Unlike most of the students, we realize that naming makes a difference. Our question became: how do we help the students realize the significance of

the way our God is named? We believed this significance could encourage the girls particularly to hear themselves voiced in that naming. As Joann Wolski Conn states so aptly: "It can actually alienate a woman from her own experience when she presumes the 'Holy," is not at all like herself" (quoted in Dorney, 1985, p. 51). Surely the reverse of this statement, that of presuming that the Holy can be related to experiencing oneself as woman, is an important goal for the teaching of religious education to adolescents, particularly female adolescents. Our attempt to answer our own question stated above is articulated in the next section and the following theme.

Concluding Insights for Religious Education

In the previous two themes insights were gained into the fact that the teaching approach used focused, for the most part, on the significance as it were of a patriarchal voice: equality meant seeking entrance into the male world; smartness meant wondering how well girls measured up to male expectations. This theme, in large measure, initiated by Catherine's question, "Could Jesus be a girl?" and our question, "Can God be called Mother?" offered more possibilities for a feminist voice to be heard. Yet as these two questions were raised they were met with resistance in the classroom expressed through male bonding as well as by previous knowledge of the Catholic tradition. At the same time there were glimmers of openness to a new way of naming God. The following insights for teaching are cognizant of both the resistance and the openness.

The incredible fact about the resistance of the boys in the classroom to the question "Could Jesus be a girl?" was that the girl who asked it was not suggesting that Jesus <u>be</u> a girl in the video program. She was wondering if she

could dress up as the male Jesus! The reason she gave for her request, once she got an opportunity to speak, was that: "If all they had been doing in class had been centered on women, they why not?" At the time of her request the students had been engaged in a biblical study of Jesus and his relationship with women.

Eventually Maria made the final choice, at the students' request, about who would play various roles. She chose John to play Jesus and Catherine to play the woman taken in adultery. Both Maria and the students recognized that John and Catherine were extremely talented in acting. However, mindful of the tensions that had arisen Maria stressed "there are no stars, not even Jesus." I wrote in my notes that day: "Does John, do the boys believe this?" When Maria read this preceding question of mine she asked herself a brutally honest question: "I wonder if I wasn't unconsciously supporting the chauvinism present in the boys' resistance? I still think I chose Catherine for the woman taken in adultery because she was right for the part. However . . . ."

Maria's honesty made me realize the necessity of constant reflection on our motivations as teachers. Even with a certain degree of feminist consciousness it is still so easy to let an event or a comment go unnoticed. We were both left wondering what would have happened if Catherine had been given an opportunity to role play the part of Jesus. Would we have at least weakened the link made between the male Jesus and the male students?

As the rehearsals started John and Catherine got into a lot of arguments. John was very bossy. At the end of one difficult session Catherine came to talk privately to Maria. I felt it was a sensitive conversation and left. As I left I heard Maria say: "Oh, Catherine, what we poor women have to suffer." The remark made me wonder if it might have been good to have used the resistance of the boys, which had caused them to immediately jump to conclusions, as a

worthwhile discussion point. Why was it so important to defend a male Jesus? We could have encouraged the girls to come out of their silence and say how they were feeling about this instant male bonding. Yet, there was a sensitive situation present in the classroom in that both Maria and I felt a strong identification with the girls on that particular occasion. It was one thing to commiserate with Catherine in private, but another to side with the girls in the public forum of the classroom.

An important insight for me was to realize the difficulty of being a feminist teacher and, therefore, strongly critical of certain events in the classroom while at the same time being respectful to both males and females. Maria taught me many lessons in this regard because I saw her trying to accept the students where they were at. This acceptance meant that her own strong feelings on a particular topic could not always surface. Strangely, silence on the part of the feminist teacher might sometimes be the gift that allows a feminist voice to be eventually heard and spoken among the students.

The resistance of calling God "Mother" by presenting previous Christian knowledge did not occur with such strong feelings. Yet the resistance posed a real dilemma for us. Maria stated this dilemma very clearly one day when we were talking about our own consciousness of the patriarchal overtones and "undertones" of the Bible. She recognized the difficulty of raising this kind of consciousness with adolescents: "Children at this age in their faith development need stability. You know I can go to a Scripture course and find out that a lot of the Bible is based on who wrote it. But the kids, how much of that can you tell them without them shooting the whole wad - you have to be careful."

It is important to point out that her statement is one that many Catholic religion teachers raise. From the Catholic perspective today the Bible is not

read literally, in the scientific sense of the word. Rather, as Catholics, we are encouraged to understand the message of the Bible by considering such aspects as: the cultural background of the text, the reason various authors wrote the text, why some books were accepted as valid for faith by the church and others rejected, the relationship of books to one another, how they are interpreted today, and the various forms of writing that are used to convey a message. This approach to the Bible has only been emphasized in general preaching and teaching since Vatican Council II, 1962-65. Many Catholic teachers, like Maria and myself, grew up with a more literal approach to the Bible and have had our own presuppositions challenged. The change has not been easy for many teachers who have had to put aside some of their previous understandings and take time to update themselves.

What does this approach mean for teaching the Bible to adolescents? This approach calls for the ability to understand literary forms of writing and in doing so to realize that myth, poetry, and religious interpretations of historical events are more "truthful" than science when it comes to religious faith. Do adolescents have this ability? I believe that young people in a highly technological culture such as ours are often prevented from progressing beyond a concrete way of thinking to a more symbolic way since they are enculturated to value "actual" facts over more hidden truths. These truths are as Antoine Exupery once stated, so wisely "invisible to the eye."

Maria felt very strongly that, although literary form was taught in the grade nine language course, students don't read the great works of literature. Consequently they don't develop the capacity to go below surface facts to discover hidden meanings. The dilemma then in teaching Scripture to young people is helping them to see beyond the 'actual' facts of the text to a deeper "seeing" with the eyes of faith. From a feminist perspective the patriarchal facts

of the text often become a further obstacle to a deeper "seeing" of the Bible as a faith story supportive of women.

Maria and I would agree with many feminist biblical scholars that it is necessary for our own faith to find "a usable past" in the Bible (Ruether, 1983; Russell, 1974) as well as in later doctrinal development (McFague, 1987). These scholars and others like them point out that for the past to be "usable" for women: "There needs to be a recovery of the voice and experience of women. To continue to neglect or ignore women's voices in this history is to contribute to the silencing of women today" (Dorney, 1985, p. 47).

Two suggestions for the recovery of women's voices that we felt could be appropriate for young people arose in our conversations together. The first one was to explore female imagery for God in the Bible and in some later Christian writings. This exploration could at least assure the students that the idea of imaging God as Mother was rooted in faith tradition. They could also note the myriad images for God in the Bible beyond the patriarchal and parental ones. For many students today, thinking of God as Father or Mother is problematic in relationship to their own home experiences. A number of religion teachers have noted this problem to me in the last few years.

As I wrote the phrase above, "God as Mother," I felt that the important word "as" should have been included in our original question to the students: "Can we also name God as Mother?" This would have helped the students to grasp, albeit in a simple way, that names for God are metaphorical. They are our human ways of using the best of human experience such as human relationships, aspects of nature to name the One Who as stated earlier can never be fully described. Our question encouraged the students to stress a literal imaging of God in the form of a female person which is just as bad as imaging "Him" in a male form. Using the simple word "as" would allow for a

consideration of the characteristics associated with the name of mother, father, friend similar to the ideas that can be associated with referring to God as the "Rock of Ages" or the "The Bread of Life." Unfortunately, we did not have time to explore this approach in our time together.

Our second suggestion was to consider a number of New Testament stories concerning Jesus and his relationship to women. We felt that this approach would be a positive one since it would allow the students to recognize the cultural male bias in the Bible yet realize that it was a bias that was resisted by Jesus. Such an approach therefore would make it possible to note the "corrective principle" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983) within the Bible itself. During our time together this last approach was pursued and culminated in the students making a video on "The Woman taken in Adultery." The next theme "Casting the First Stone" relates the experiences of this approach.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CASTING THE FIRST STONE

Introduction

This theme, "Casting the First Stone," developed from the insight referred to at the end of the last chapter that the students should have an opportunity to explore some of the biblical stories concerning Jesus' relationship with women. The intent was to help them discover that the vision of Jesus was one of inclusiveness and mutuality. In exploring this vision we hoped the students would realize that Christian teaching, despite much of its patriarchal bias and form, does essentially stand for the full dignity of women as well as men. Furthermore we hoped that the students would perceive the relevance of the bible stories to their own everyday experiences.

An exciting project that grew out of the study of Jesus' relationship with women was the making of a video of the following gospel story, "The Woman Accused of Adultery" (John 8:3-11). The fact that the majority of the students voted to dramatize this story rather than several others points, I believe, to the fact that the theme of the story spoke strongly to their own lives. In fact it is sad to say that the relevance of the story was more than evident in their consciousness, especially the girls, as to how women are still "accused" today.

The evidence that the story spoke to the consciousness of the students was noted in a number of views expressed in class with respect to themselves as girls and boys. It also showed in their recognition of what occurs in the adult world. Yet, on a more positive note, their involvement in producing "The woman accused of adultery," provided several occasions for some healthy

conversations about relationships between women and men. These conversations are significant for adolescents who, as Maria stated, are at a time of their life when: "The absolute importance is on social relationships - getting along and maybe having your first girlfriend, boyfriend, or going to your first dance. You know it's all how am I going to relate to the opposite sex? Hormones go crazy in junior high." While I observed that, generally speaking, the boys and girls related well with each other there were times when it was possible to detect that they had certain images of one another that did not express a positive relationship between females and males.

Accusatory Labels in the Classroom

Several class incidents pointed to some strong enculturated images of females with respect to their objectification as sex objects calling for their own accusation. I relate these incidents because they help set the stage, so to speak, for how the students reacted to the biblical account of "the woman accused of adultery."

The first incident related to the topic of fantasizing and daydreaming. The students had been watching Michael Jackson's video "The Man in the Mirror." Maria asked about the emotional reaction of the audience on the video, an audience that was mostly female. She asked why girls faint and get all emotional, but boys don't. This question unleased so many reactions that Maria constantly had to insist that people put up their hands if they wanted to speak.

At first the conversation centered on emotions and the fact that girls are more expressive and by that fact, as one girl remarked, seen as weaker. One boy commented: "Maybe we only believe that about girls because the media always displays girls showing emotions." I include his comment because I was

never sure as this theme progressed whether statements about the girls were simply repeated based on their cultural awareness, or whether the boys were personally committed to these statements. I always wanted to believe it was the former, especially because I observed that these grade nine boys and girls seemed to generally display respectful attitudes towards one another in the classroom setting. However, certain topics such as the maleness of Jesus and sexually related views about females indicated a strong undercurrent of disrespect that would erupt when topics like these were raised.

The topic of emotions somehow led to a discussion about fantasizing and daydreaming. Basically the boys argued that they have fantasies about doing well in sports and those fantasies could be realized. They pointed out that the girls, ("you girls,") were always fantasizing about dating or marrying some famous person and that kind of fantasy can't be realized. Their rationale was greeted with a mixture of hoots of laughter, groans, and some angry comments from the girls. Again, as with the issue of the maleness of Jesus, there was a sense of male bonding around this topic. Yet, this time the girls bonded together and strongly voiced their protest.

As part of this protest one of the girls asked the boys what their pictures of girls on their lockers meant to them. At first no reason was offered. There was simply a strong insistence on the realism of boys' fantasies. Amidst all the bantering that went on, which was quite hostile at times, one of the boys said that boys are more confident in their daydreams about girls "because they know they can get what they want." There were strong protesting groans from both Maria and the girls. I know that I looked horrified. It was a chilling statement for me although I tried to convince myself that it was not a representative comment with respect to the boys in this classroom. Maybe in reference to my earlier comments stated above the boy himself didn't really own the statement.

Nevertheless it was difficult to hear a statement that, in spite of much progress, still lingers as culturally acceptable in a large part of the world.

Because of the argumentative tone of this discussion and the boy's statement about "getting what they want," Maria decided to return to the topic in the next class. She hoped to challenge some of the suppositions made, but, it just didn't seem possible to have a calm class discussion with the students. The boys continued accusing and the girls continued protesting. Towards the end of the class Maria said rather firmly to them: "The purpose of this is not to run anyone down but to speak from your own life."

After class Maria and I had a brief discussion. I asked her what she thought about the boys' insistence that they were more realistic than the girls in their fantasizing. What was the meaning they attached to the pictures of girls in their lockers? Was it different, in their minds, from the girls' perceptions of male pictures in their lockers? We didn't have much time to explore these questions. However, Maria said that the accusations of the boys might be related to the fact that they viewed the girls as "investing their emotions in their pictures."

Suddenly a light went on for me, figuratively speaking. Were the boys looking at their female posters as objects rather than long-term relationships? Objects can more easily be had than relationships. If so, they could justifiably describe themselves as being realistic about their fantasies. At the same time did the boys sense that the girls were looking at their male posters and fantasizing about relationships rather than objects? Obviously relationships with their male heroes are unattainable. If so, the girls' fantasies could be described as unrealistic. I began to see that this description, if it were true, could be a compliment.

I do not intend by these reflections to assume that all girls and boys necessarily fantasize the same way. Perhaps Maria and I were not even fair to

interpret the meaning of the grade nine boys' statements in the manner that has been described. However, the following incidents do seem to point to the fact that our interpretation was not entirely unjustified.

I was not present for these incidents. However, Maria related them to me when we were discussing whether or not the statements made about the girls referred to in the preceding paragraph had any real effect in their day to day encounters. The incidents occurred spontaneously and point to some of the undesirable undercurrents referred to earlier.

The first incident involved an explosive situation that occurred in class while the students were working together in groups. There were generally four or five persons in a group. Most of the groups were comprised of boys and girls. The students usually chose their own groups. One of the boys called a girl "a whore." Maria said she ignored the remark at first but when another boy said: "Well maybe she is" she decided to intervene. In pursuing the idea of calling someone a whore she pointed out the double standard in such a label. The label refers to the kind of woman who offers herself for sex in exchange for money. However, the label is not attached to men, although they are the ones that use women by accepting the offering. In response, the boy who had called the girl a whore repeatedly said, "They (women) make us do it." Some boys agreed with this statement. Maria said there were a lot of angry feelings expressed. I asked her how the class ended. She felt the girls felt powerless, especially the girl who had been labelled, even though she had challenged the remark.

A sadder part of this kind of accusation also seems to be that at times the girls themselves buy into this kind of labelling. For example, Maria told me about one of her grade eight students in art class who, for the cartoon assignment, drew a provocative looking woman and said to her: "I have drawn a

slut." Maria was really taken back and said to her: "Well I hope you are going to draw a man, too." This time the girl was taken back. Maria questioned her about the meaning of the word slut. She didn't answer and appeared very embarrassed.

Connecting the female to the concept of a slut was also noted by Maria when we were discussing on one occasion the various girl-boy relationships that were emerging in the classroom. She referred to one "couple" who had caused some concern for the teachers because they appeared to be too physically involved with one another. In reference to this relationship she stated: "She has been labelled a slut; but has he been labelled a slut? Heck, no!" Maria was concerned that the girl's reputation would follow her to high school especially when a young female teacher on staff commented: "You know she is called a slut and that's the way it is. We can't change that." Maria said she was so disgusted at the remark she was left speechless.

It was this kind of situation as well as the discussion in class that led Maria and I to talk about the importance of the biblical story of the woman accused of adultery. We were happy that the students chose to dramatize it for their video program.

The "Accused" - Relevance for Today

This subtitle has an obvious reference to a recent movie The Accused. The film is based on a real life situation, again relatively recent, in which a woman is gang raped in a public bar while a number of men cheer the rapists on. The title of the film refers to those men who cheered as well as those who raped. They were accused and found guilty. But the underlying theme hidden in the title is the struggle to prove that the victim herself is not the "accused," not

guilty of provoking the rape. I know I could not sit through this film. The fact is that many of the grade nine students had seen it and the film gave one of the girls an opportunity to state that there was a very direct connection to the bible story of the woman accused of adultery and the way women are still treated today.

This direct connection was made by the girl in a small group setting, two girls and three boys, who were asked to read the bible account of the woman accused of adultery. After the reading they were to discuss Jesus' attitude towards the woman and what they could learn from his attitude for our own lives. I asked to join this group as the students began reading the biblical account. As soon as the reading was over one of the boys said: "We don't do that now" (men don't stone women). Immediately both girls responded that blame was still placed on the woman. As an example of this blame one of the girls made reference to the film, The Accused. The reference was incorporated later into their video script:

> How does it (bible story) relate to now? We don't go around stoning women. Oh, yes we do, just indirectly.
>
> Yea, like that movie, "The Accused", or any rape case. The woman is always asked "What type of clothes were you wearing?" or "Did you provoke it?" Of course, she didn't beg for rape.

I was impressed with the girls' ability to see that "blame," "accusation," is just as devastating as being threatened with actual stones. At the same time I was amazed that so many of the grade nine students had seen this film since it is X-rated. As Maria pointed out to me: "They have seen everything, because they can get it on video." In the small group discussion referred to above we also talked about a film that some of the group and myself had seen that week. It was about a teacher who had been raped. She became pregnant and kept

the child. For this latter reason she was dismissed for immorality. One girl said, "Oh, yes, the movie was called Cast the First Stone." Immediately there was a recognition in the group with respect to this title and the biblical story they had just read.

The recognition that "stoning" of women still occurs today was repeated a number of times by those students who wanted to dramatize this particular bible story. Since the students handed in their reasons anonymously to Maria unfortunately I do not know whether the following representative statements were made by girls or boys:

> You could relate easily to the story of happenings going on now.
>
> Because today it is the same. If a man had an affair all the woman could do is cry and leave but if a woman had an affair the man could hit her and both ways she'd be hurt.

This same kind of recognition was named in the script that accompanied the video. Following is part of the introduction:

> We chose the story of the woman taken in adultery from St. John's gospel. Adultery means fooling around. Having an affair. We think this story says a lot about life for women then, and life for women now.

While Maria and I were happy that the biblical story of "the woman taken in adultery" did lead to insights about our contemporary world, at the same time I began to feel a certain discomfort regarding how the boys might be feeling about the relevance of the story for them. After all, the story was strongly condemnatory towards men, none of whom could claim to be innocent enough to cast the first stone. Furthermore, it was also clear that Jesus was resisting the idea that only the woman should have been publicly condemned. What kind of message were we giving to the boys?

Blaming All Men

As the video script was being produced and dramatized I began to notice that the girls played a much more prominent role than the boys both with respect to speaking out in the discussions and influencing the writing of the script. For example, in the small discussion group referred to above the boys were silent when examples of false accusations against women were raised. The day that we were actually filming I began to feel very embarrassed about some of the script and I wrote in my notes: "Will we be embarrassed to show this tape and hear females condemning males?" Following is a brief excerpt from the script:

> Girl: And women had to obey and sort of worship a male throughout their lives. First their fathers then their husbands.
>
> Girl: And that still goes on.
>
> Girl: How unfair. How can we stand those men? (Three boys enter.)
>
> Girls: You are so unfair.
>
> Boys: What did we do?
>
> Girls: What you have been doing for the last 2000 years.

There is some protest by males in the script but a rather mild one.

> Girl: It is always the woman who gets the bad side of things.
>
> Boy: I wouldn't say that, it can work both ways. Like in affairs. You can't say only males go around by themselves fooling around.
>
> Girl: But who is the one pushed in the corner with no where to go?
>
> Girl: Who's the one who gets put down by everyone while the other is known as a macho stud.

During the filming one young man who was a high school work experience student said to me: "They are just putting men down, that's all they are doing." The director (a woman and his employer) replied: "But don't you think some of this is justified?" I wasn't present for the rest of the conversation but I remember thinking about the problem of naming oppression in front of those who may not be personally guilty but nevertheless because of race, religion, or gender, in this case, are a reminder of those who oppress. Again I wondered how the grade nine boys were feeling about their involvement in this script. I did pick up some indirect reaction from them shortly after the making of the video.

As a final wrap-up to the making of the video Maria asked the students to write down some of their thoughts about what they had learned from this experience (referred to in the next chapter). She began the class by reading two letters from the local newspaper regarding the Montreal massacre of fourteen women. One was written by a female, one by a male. Both spoke against violence towards women. As she finished reading one boy spontaneously said: "That first letter (written by female) was sexist." "What do you mean?" said Maria. The boy answered: "Well, she's just blaming all men. You can't condemn all men for just one incident." "No," said Maria, "but there is violence daily towards women. Even as we sit here, women are being raped and beaten." Another boy said: "But we don't do that in junior high." Immediately a girl retorted: "Not physically, but mentally, yes." Maria then stated to my astonishment and many of the students judging by the looks on their faces: "I know of one case in this school where it is physical." Her statement was greeted with silence.

After the class I said to Maria: "I wonder how the boys feel about all this." She replied quite matter of factly: "Probably uneasy." I felt she was far more

comfortable about letting the boys stay with their uneasiness than I was. Maybe she was more aware of their need to feel uneasy since she knew quite a bit about the male/female relationships both within and outside of the classroom. Maria talked about the situation where one of the boys had hit his girlfriend several times. The girl had low self-esteem and didn't seem to have the courage to stay away from him. Several teachers, including Maria, were trying to help her in this regard. Thinking back to the incidents regarding fantasy, whore, slut, referred to previously, I wondered if I, like Maria, needed to learn to be more comfortable with creating uneasiness among the boys.

Insights for Ourselves as Adults

As Maria and I experienced and reflected on many of the incidents related in this theme we were constantly reminded of how we as adult women have to deal with similar incidents in our own life situations. We have both been fortunate to have for the most part experienced respect from males. At the same time, as our feminist consciousness has grown, we have become aware of pervasive attitudes and related behaviors that leave us with the fear of being an "accused" victim. The fear that says if we speak up we will be the one on trial. It is important for us as educators to name this fear as it affects the way we approach the sensitive topic of female/male relationships in a co-ed situation.

It is crucial to point out in naming our fear that we have been deeply affected by an event that occurred during the time of this research. This event, briefly referred to already, was the Montreal massacre of fourteen women (December 9th, 1989). One may argue, as many did, that this massacre was simply the action of a mentally ill man and no more. Nevertheless, it would have to be admitted that the event became for many, including ourselves, not

only a horrifying action but a symbolic statement highlighting the issue of violence towards women.

The fact that the man killed these women because he stated that they were feminists struck fear and anger into the hearts of many women. Women who themselves have experienced physical and mental cruelty and who have never raised their voice for fear of further recrimination. Women, who like ourselves, have been fortunate not to have experienced extreme violence but have nevertheless been fearful to speak up in face of cynical comments and demeaning humor about "you feminists."

Ironically and tragically the term "feminist" which, despite its philosophical variations (cf. Chapter Four), is intended to make a statement about women's refusal to be the object of the gaze (Irigaray, 1974) is frequently interpreted in such a way that the term becomes another excuse to treat women as objects of derision. Fearful of "accusing" interpretations, women, like ourselves, are often reluctant to use the description "feminist." My own decision to refer to myself as a feminist throughout this study (cf. Chapter One) and to begin to name myself this way in my daily life was a conscious decision based on the fact that at this present stage of my life referring to myself as a feminist gives me an opportunity to speak about a particular understanding of what it means to be a woman. Yet the fear of speaking up for oneself, whether or not one is referring to oneself as a feminist, still remains for both of us as the following examples demonstrate.

I have been constantly struck by the fact that my own fear of speaking up when I feel insulted by sexual innuendos about women that hide a thinly veiled belief that "she asked for it" is the fact that I will be regarded as a prudish nun - not too "with it," not part of the "real world." For this reason I have often let

certain situations go by in silence fearful of these accusatory labels. This study has helped me to gain more courage to speak up.

Likewise Maria has also felt a reluctance to speak up, fearful of the innuendos about not being married. For example, she, like a number of other women on our staffs, are frequently subjected to male teachers who overtly display the "sunshine girl" (scantily dressed girl prominently photographed each day in a local newspaper) on the staff room table. Again, as Maria noted, there is the difficulty of speaking up and finding oneself accused.

If this difficulty were related to just a case of images, in words and pictures, of how women are viewed it might be possible to remain silent about these images, confident of the fact that they had nothing to do with everyday realities between women and men. However, the connection is just too evident. Two cases of sexual harassment that I became aware of during the time of this study convinced me of such a connection. In one case the woman who finally spoke up felt she had to leave her place of work because of the accusing way she was treated by several colleagues, women and men. In another case,women who had made private complaints to their employer about a male's inappropriate sexual behavior at work denied or trivialized their complaints when asked to testify about them publicly. When questioning these women and others like them about their situation one always senses in them the fear of being dragged out in public wondering who will cast not only the first stone but many stones.

In reflecting on the "casting of the first stone" however, I suggested to Maria that I felt it was important not to fall into the temptation of becoming a stone thrower myself. She agreed with my observation as we reflected on some of our conversations on the topic of sexuality. For example, it is quite possible to read our reflections and wonder if men have any innocence at all with respect

to the topic under discussion. Are not they themselves at times the victims of false accusation? Our statements are not meant to blame all men but rather to point out that the patriarchal system, which men more symbolically and really represent than women, in so many ways endorses the fact that women are more likely to be seen as "guilty" victims.

This fact, which I shared with Maria, was brought home to me by an insightful comment made by a man in one of my university classes. He spoke of the times when he would get on an elevator where there was only a woman and himself. Frequently he noted the fear on her face. He often wanted to assure her that he was: "really a very nice man, happily married etc." However, he had grown to accept that like it or not he represented, by very reason of being male, those men who choose to take advantage of women who are alone.

The women in the class admitted to him that he was right to note the fear in a woman's face. We said that it was our fear in such situations even though we constantly assure ourselves in the elevator, walking home from work, working late in the office building, that we are simply being paranoid. The fear is two-edged. The fear of being victimized by a violent assault and the fear of what will happen to us if we relate this assault to others. At the same time it is important to note that this elevator story also demonstrates that men too fear blame. They too become victims "accused" by the distrustful gaze.

As the study on the woman accused of adultery took place in class Maria and myself reflected on the meaning of the story for our own lives. Sadly we found it difficult to turn to our Christian tradition for support, at least the way we had learnt our tradition. Maria once mentioned that looking at the stories of Jesus' relationship with women through feminist eyes had helped her to realize that there were things in the stories that she had never thought of before. I heartily agreed with her. For example, both of us grew up being very familiar

with the story of the woman accused of adultery. But the emphasis given was always on the woman as sinner and how fortunate she was that Jesus saved her. No one ever said anything about her male counterpart and we never asked about him. Even when we realized that the men were not innocent enough to "cast the first stone," we never questioned the law that said women should be stoned for being caught in adultery. Neither did we know that : "Adultery for Jewish women could consist merely in speaking to a male alone" (Thistlethwaite, 1985).

We also realized that beginning with the story of Eve, Eve the temptress, we had been implicitly taught that women are the guilty party when it comes to sexual relationships. In this regard I shared with Maria Susan Thistlethwaite's study on battered women. The author states that many of these women did not speak up because they had been taught that submissiveness to their husbands was their primary duty and, therefore, they must have done something wrong to warrant the abuse. She found that submissiveness was most prevalent in women with religious beliefs stating that based on their knowledge of scripture as preached to them: "they have the most difficulty in accepting that violence against them is wrong" (1985, p. 99).

Maria and I reflected on how distant this kind of biblical interpretation was from the actual message of Christ. It made us realize the importance of reading our Christian stories with critical eyes if we were to help ourselves and young people see in these stories a message of dignity and respect for all. We were glad that we had provided an occasion for the grade nine students to see a familiar bible story with new eyes. That occasion had provided us with some important insights.

Concluding Insights for Religious Education

Two purposes for exploring Jesus' relationship to women were stated in the introduction to this chapter: (1) presenting the vision of Jesus as one of inclusivity and mutuality and (2) noting the relevance of the bible stories to the students' own lives. As the story of the woman accused of adultery emerged it became evident that the students, particularly the girls, were well aware that females today often find themselves in a similar situation with respect to accusation. However, as the girls protested that the "casting of the first stone" was still happening today in reply to "We (men) don't do that anymore," I began to wonder if the vision of inclusivity and mutuality did not somehow get lost. By presenting the bible story in favour of the woman was this presentation ironically fraught with the same problems of exclusivity as previous biblical interpretations which ignored the plight of the woman? Once again the same question arose referred to in the previous theme: how do teachers point out patriarchal bias in the Bible and still demonstrate that it offers an inviting vision for all?

A difficult problem for me in proposing an inviting vision for all was learning to deal with uneasiness. This was not Maria's problem, and I found her insights on the subject of uneasiness very helpful. As mentioned earlier I felt embarrassed about the accusing comments regarding men in the video script. On another occasion I had the same feeling when Maria was reading an article to the students on the world at the time of Jesus. Certain phrases stood out such as : "The Gospels unanimously insist that the most faithful followers Jesus had were women" (p. 74); "Their (women's) fidelity makes a staggering contrast to their male counterpart's" (p. 77).

After the reading, which had reviewed the inferior status of females at that time, one of the girls commented that "It seemed really stupid what women had to go through." Immediately a boy mentioned that "Men were stereotyped, too. They had to go out and work." I found myself making a defensive statement on behalf of the boys. To offset the hierarchical status of men over women I reminded the class that "It was a rough world in the time of Jesus and men often had to protect women." I am not comfortable with having made this statement as I read it now since I feel strongly that the role of protector too easily becomes the role of controller. Besides, as Maria quickly pointed out when she read my statement, "It was men that were making the world rough, making the wars." Her point was that men wouldn't have to get into the role of protector if they had examined what kind of world they were creating. Our comments here are not meant to depreciate the kind of mutual protection and care that we should all have towards one another at various times in our lives. At the same time it is important to note the possible link between protection and control.

At the end of the class in which the article had been read a boy commented to Maria and me that "Maybe some of the women ran away when it (Bible) said the disciples fled." I could see that he was resisting the statements made regarding the absolute fidelity of the women. Maria pointed out that it only mentions women at the foot of the Cross. We should have added that the disciple John is also recorded as being present with the women. Again I found myself saying to the boy much to my own amazement "Perhaps the women had less to lose. They were not likely to get crucified by being there. The men might have if they had stayed." Later I related the response I had made to this boy to a male religious educator. He told me he thought I was being very kind in my interpretation. In my own notes after this conversation with the boy and the

reading in class I wrote "I don't want the stories of women in the Gospel to end up having the boys feel inferior."

In discussing my reactions with Maria I said to her "I seem to end up being more concerned with how the boys were feeling than rejoicing that the girls were receiving a message that Jesus resisted unfair treatment of women in his day." I noted to Maria that she seemed much more comfortable in allowing the possibility of uneasiness with the boys. She replied "Maybe I sound mean in this." I hastened to assure Maria that I felt she was not mean but rather insightful about her teaching. In this regard I shared with her an article by Magda Lewis (1990) which deals with teaching situations that create discomfort for males.

In reference to a female student in one of Lewis' class who worried about how the men might be feeling about the topic under discussion, peace and patriarchal violence, the author states "Such a protective posture on the part of women on behalf of men is a common drama played out in many classrooms whether or not men are present" (pp. 473, 474). Lewis maintains that this protective posture allows men "to reappropriate a speaking space for themselves," a space being used for the sharing of women's experiences. This reappropriation gives men an opportunity to redirect a topic such as the one mentioned in Lewis' class to a notion of "world violence as a human and not a gendered problem" (p. 475).

Maria wholeheartedly agreed with Lewis' comments. She stated that it was not a question of blaming individual boys in the class but rather a question of helping boys to see their own socialization patterns as males which encourage them to believe that "they can get what they want." She felt that in order for boys to be liberated from this kind of thinking it was necessary to name

this kind of belief directly by saying for example "Boys you have inherited this (socialization). You are going to have to break it down."

Maria's last comment related to an insight that I had begun to discover with respect to my own feeling of uneasiness. I felt that while I could be "accused" of falling into a "protective posture" at the same time it was possible that my uneasiness stemmed from a genuine desire to ensure that the biblical stories of Jesus are seen as liberating for both men and women. Maria's point was essentially that liberation can only take place when the oppressive situation is named. Her statement made me remember that for Christians the liberating message of Christ can only be received by those who are willing to admit that certain aspects of their lives are in need of liberation. Hence certain actions, such as demeaning attitudes towards women, do need to be named even if the males present are made to feel uncomfortable. In this regard I shared with Maria an insight from Letty Russell's book Growth for Partnership (1981) on the need for "a pedagogy for oppressors" (p. 110).

Russell, in expanding on the work of Friere, states that in order to work towards mutuality (partnership) we need to ensure that the oppressed not only name their oppression for themselves but that they seek to name it to their oppressors who also need to "unveil the world of oppression and begin the process of transformation" (p. 111).

Through the story of the woman accused of adultery, the boys did need to hear from the girls that stoning of women still happens today. Even if they may or may not be involved with this stoning through their own treatment of females, they need to realize the oppression exists. Along with this realization the boys should be encouraged to realize that their Christian task as males is to resist the kind of societal messages they constantly receive as to their "rights" regarding females.

As Maria stated so aptly we have to let the boys know "You do have another choice." In order to take another step beyond naming the oppression brought about by "accusers," (in this case, males) perhaps we should have explored with the boys some of the choices males could make with respect to how they image and treat females. Naming is important as a beginning way to change. Yet is is also important to have learning opportunities that help us to change previous patterns of behavior. Otherwise a person can simply be left with guilt and no hope of reconciliation.

In this regard Maria agreed with me that we could have presented the gospel story as a story in which Jesus does not condemn the males outright but rather invites them to a personal choice of naming their wrongdoing and thereby refusing to comply to an unjust law. Surely it is not stretching the gospel story too much to state that the experience of <u>not</u> casting the first stone was probably a liberating experience for at least some of the men.

A final question obviously remains. What about the girls? With respect to proposing an inclusive vision for all we were encouraged to see that the girls seemed very affirmed by the fact that Jesus rescued the woman from stoning. The very topic of this gospel story allowed the girls to strongly voice their awareness and protest of how women are frequently viewed as objects - "sex-objects" rather than as subjects with choices. As one girl wrote "I think commercials should not show sexy women draped over cars, instead they should show the car because that is what they are going to get." In many ways then this topic "belonged" to the girls.

Yet as they so easily named the situation of "accused" women today, I asked Maria if she saw a problem with the fact that the girls simply named what was happening and pointed to their accusers. We talked about the difficulty of what Maria referred to as "a dangerous line of thinking" in not wanting to

present females as entirely innocent with respect to sexual exploitation. After all Jesus did tell the woman to "Go and sin no more." The full message of the story, therefore, is that neither male or female is without sin. Yet as Maria emphatically stressed we definitely do not want to end up insinuating that the female is the one at fault, in the sense of being the one who "asked for it."

In our teaching, we need to point out that even if a girl does dress seductively, for example, this still does not give a man permission to rape her. Yet at the same time we agreed as religious educators that we also need to point out to girls that intentionally or unintentionally they may be giving certain messages of permission by the way they dress or behave. We never really resolved the dilemma inherent in teaching both aspects except to state that the way out of the dilemma is to teach that mutuality has to be an abiding principle for wholesome relationships. A principle which implies that both males and females should work together to define responsible and respectful behavior.

As these four themes were written and reflected on with my partner-in-conversation, I began to think about contemporary approaches to religious education that influence our way of teaching religion in the classroom setting. In returning to my fundamental question for this study: "What is the significance of a feminist voice to the religious educating of young people?" it seemed essential as a way of answering my question to ask if these contemporary approaches do in fact allow a feminist voice to be heard? Relying on the insights gained in these four themes the next chapter will explore my response to this question.

SECTION THREE: INTERPRETATIONS

CHAPTER NINE

PRACTICING THE QUESTION

> Perhaps by ourselves at first, we can begin to
> practice: practice saying our own names
> and finding our own voices (Harris, 1988, p. 27).

Introduction

The first chapter of this study begins with Maria Harris' comments regarding the discovery of silence of and about women (see page one). This silence, I would agree, is deafening once you have heard it. In this chapter I find the same author's words, quoted above, enlightening with respect to the experience of this study. It has been for me, the writer, an experience of practicing to find my own voice: by doing research with my partner-in-conversation; in writing the themes; and by learning slowly how to speak about myself as a feminist Catholic woman to other people.

The imagery of practicing speaks of not having yet reached a final response to my question. Yet as the old adage goes, "practice makes perfect," and so I can truthfully say that in the practicing of my questions I have discovered with my partner-in-conversation some responses to - "What is the significance of a feminist voice for the teaching of religious education to adolescents?"

These responses have caused me to think about the present approach to teaching religious education in our Catholic schools which was affirmed in the renewal of the Catholic Church beginning with the Second Vatican Council

(1962-1965). A brief summary of this present approach will be offered in this chapter in order to contextualize insights gained from this study.

Since I have the major responsibility for addressing the question for this study, this chapter is not written in the same partnership style with Maria as the previous four thematic chapters. However, she does return in Chapter Ten to voice her own insights from the experience of sharing this research question with me.

Responding to the Question - A Dilemma

In responding to my research question I am aware of a dilemma within myself. This dilemma relates to whether or not my insights are intended to benefit females or both females and males. It is true that my question is framed "for the teaching of religious education to adolescents." Yet a feminist perspective has a specific intent. This intent focuses in on gender consciousness with respect to females. Is such a perspective beneficial for all students? In a way I have come full circle to my first question raised during a feminist workshop. Isn't this focus promoting exclusivity again (Chapter One, p. 6)?

In trying to solve this dilemma as well as explain to the readers of this study the focus of my responses, I offer the following image of myself standing in bookstores which have two sections side by side: books for women, books for men. Until recently a section of books for women written by women was not a prominent part of a "regular" bookstore or library. Now women, like myself, breathe easier as we hurry to the section that speaks the "truth" of ourselves. Yet, even more recently one finds a "companion" section - books for men written by men. Herein lies my dilemma.

I stand before this latter section with mixed feelings. Sometimes I feel angry. Don't men own the language in the whole store except the "women's section"? Why then do they need a special section? Is this a way of getting back at women? On the other hand as I read the titles dealing with such topics as male spirituality, the meaning of fatherhood, I rejoice that men are asking similar questions that women ask of themselves. Perhaps these two sections are partner steps on the way to an authentic inclusive bookstore. A bookstore where women will not need to search for their "own" section to read about themselves. Yet, in order to avoid an "inclusiveness" which assumes the presence of females, as in the term "men," it may be necessary to stay with our partner sections for some time.

I move back to the women's section knowing in the spirit of Virginia Woolf (1929) that this is my "room" for now. Likewise, in writing about the significance of a feminist perspective for teaching religious education to adolescents, I feel that the significance that must be first attended to is the absence/presence of the perspective of females in the sharing of the Christian story. My responses to my research question must therefore be read through this "bias" (see explanation for my understanding of bias in Chapter One, p. 4).

Before giving my responses first it is necessary to step back and review the whole "bookstore" as it were, which is our present approach to teaching religious education in Catholic schools. While the review gives a general historical approach which affected religious education throughout the Catholic church, for the sake of brevity attention is mainly given to North American religious education authors.

Contemporary Approach to Teaching Religious Education

As noted earlier, this approach was affirmed in the renewal of the Catholic church which can be officially dated as beginning with the Second Vatican Council. This Council, which brought about a tremendous change in Catholicism in all aspects, took place in response to many calls for renewal from various individuals and groups particularly within the church. Of particular note for this study was the increasing concern of religious educators (mainly referred to as catechists), with respect to the content and method for teaching religion.

These religious educators were influenced, for example, by the philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859 - 1952) who argued for an approach to education that actively engaged the learners in the learning process. They began to react to the passive form of learning promoted by the use of a catechism with defined questions and answers - both of which had to be memorized. These same educators, confronted in their teaching by important life questions related to various cultural and modern changes in thinking, also saw the need for a renewal in the formulation of the content of the catechism. Mary Bryce (1981) states in her historical review of religious education that religious educators began to see that "something had to be done with the content - questions and answers. Theological formulae isolated from the context of Christian history and experience were grossly inadequate" (p. 227).

In 1936 an Austrian Jesuit, Josef Jungman, availing of the rich ecumenical biblical scholarship taking place especially at the University of Tubingen, paved the way for a renewal of teaching the content of religion. This renewal called for a return to biblical sources in place of the speculative, defensive, doctrinal approach of the catechism. Rummery (1975) states that

Jungman's book The Good News Yesterday and Today (1936, English translation not till 1952) was a watershed moment for religious education since it proposed that the teaching of religion should be done in a kerygmatic spirit, as a proclamation of the "Good News." The "Good News" (proclamation of Christ's message) was a message to be shared and witnessed to by teachers. It could not be shared solely through the doctrinal language of the church but rather in a narrative telling through the language of Scripture as well as an existential language which took into account the daily life of Christian believers.

This influential movement which in 1960 at the Catechetical Eichstaft Congress became known as the Kerygmatic Movement had a tremendous effect on religion teachers. As Rummery (1975) states:

> generations of Roman Catholics had been brought up with only a second hand contact with the Bible . . . The initial effect of this (kerygmatic approach) was on the teachers themselves, whose personal lives were enriched by their "discovery" of the complete Scriptures. (p. 12)

The significance of this movement lay in the fact that rooting the content of the faith in the narratives of Scripture opened the way back to a biblical understanding of knowing. In describing this kind of knowing, which stands over against the Greek emphasis on rational knowing which has in turn influenced so much of theology and teaching, Groome (1980) states:

> The Hebrew word for know is yada. . . . For the Hebrew yada is more by the heart than the mind, and the knowing arises not by standing back from in order to look at, but by active and intentional engagement in lived experience. (p. 141)

This biblical way of knowing, rooted in reflection, relationships, and action deeply influenced the theological understanding of a key doctrine in Catholic belief, that of revelation. The Vatican Council document on revelation, Dei Verbum, (Abbott, 1966), remains a pivotal document for understanding the

possibilities for such extensive change in the Catholic church. Revelation had been understood, especially since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), as the revelation of God's Word spoken in a complete way by the end of the apostolic age (end of first witnesses to Christ in history). The mission of the church in its official leadership (magisterium) was to interpret the meaning of God's Word to the "faithful." The role of Catholics, the "faithful," was to accept and believe unquestioningly this interpretation. Given this emphasis, revelation was seen as purely an objective source of truth outside of oneself.

With the Council, for reasons already stated above, the term "ongoing revelation" now became significant for speaking of God's revelatory presence in people's lives. This way of describing revelation, expounded in Dei Verbum, was a refreshing one for many people, among them religious educators who, as has been mentioned, were struggling with the relevance of people's life experiences for understanding Christian teaching.

Drawing on this insight into ongoing revelation, Gabriel Moran, an influential author for religious educators, wrote two companion books one year after the closing of the Vatican Council. These books were entitled Theology of Revelation (1966a) and Catechesis for Revelation (1966b). In them he reflected on the nature of revelation as process rather than fact. In true catechetical form he raises a question and answers it! The following quotations are taken from Theology of Revelation (1966):

> How can revelation be anything other than truths or objects if it is handed down from one generation to another: or reversing the question, how can a revelation consisting of personal events in the past ever be a present revelation? (p. 56)

His answer is:

> the key to a personal revelation in the twentieth century lies in the emergence of a human consciousness

> that is extremely receptive to God revealing and that remains among us to continue that revelation. (p. 56)

Moran has continued in his many books to expound on the notion of revelation and its implications for religious education. Of great benefit to the focus of this study is his reference to the aesthetic meaning of revelation. Unlike a scientific meaning which "presumed there was a body of knowledge that God has given to man. An aesthetic meaning of revelation is an invitation to discover the divine in the present experience of humans and nonhumans (Moran, 1981, p. 62).

A renewed understanding of revelation partnered with John Dewey's concept of learning through experience led to the development of a life-centered approach to teaching religious education in the mid 1960s. Rummery (1975) states: "The keynote of this life-centered approach was basically anthropological, i.e. it was concerned with the subject or recipient of catechesis in his life situation" (p. 18). Contemporary experiences such as film, music, moral issues raised by students were used as a beginning process for teaching religion.

Richard Reichert (1975) offered an approach to teaching religious education grounded in the anthropological movement. Reichert's approach is still familiar to many religious education teachers and curriculum developers. The approach involves four dimensions: (1) The Starting Point - by which he meant a recognition by the teacher of the student's psychological readiness and cultural milieu, (2) Significant Experience - which he described as "any event or combination of events that makes a person aware of how he has been living and the options for the future" (p. 10), (3) Reflection - which is "the attempt to analyze the significance of our experience and the demands it contains" (p. 11) and, (4) Assimilation - in which he called for students to have the opportunity to

"try out" their new learning in concrete action. The value of the Kerygmatic Movement in emphasizing a biblical narrative approach and the Anthropological Movement in rooting this approach in the life narrative of contemporary people still remain as important elements in the teaching of religious education today.

In the late nineteen seventies and early eighties a new consciousness crept into religious education influenced, among other factors, by liberation theology and the work of a critical theorist and educator, Paulo Friere. This consciousness recognized the harsh injustices in the world as an outgrowth of unfair structures and disparate relationships between people and between nations. Included in this recognition from a theological perspective was a realization that working for change in order to transform oppressive structures was a fundamental religious task. A keynote statement, which has guided many theological and religious education reflections since that time, was made by the National Conference of U.S.A. Bishops in their document entitled, Justice in the World (1971):

> action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel. (p. 34)

Thomas Groome's development of a shared praxis approach, a prominent approach used today, emanates the same relationship between the gospel and the world. He describes Christian Religious Education as "a political activity with pilgrims in time that deliberately and intentionally attends with them to the activity of God in our present" (1980, p. 25). By political activity he means "any deliberate and structured intervention in people's lives which attempts to influence how they live their lives in society" (p. 15). Groome's shared praxis approach lends itself to a critique not only of the individual's

significant experiences which he refers to as "the participants' stories and visions" (p. 211), but also to a critique of the slavish ideologies that have often been accepted uncritically as part of the larger "Story and Vision" of a religious tradition. He states:

> If our pilgrimage is to unfold the Vision rather than merely repeat the past, then the present cannot passively inherit and repeat the Story. We must appropriate the Story critically within the present experience, reclaim it, add to it with our own creative word, and in that sense "change" it. (p. 194)

Another influential religious educator whom I have referred to several times in this study is Maria Harris. Maria Harris has contributed to the conversation on religious education in several important ways. First she invites religious educators to reflect on the nature of teaching itself. A reflection which she finds lacking in many books on teaching which hurry past philosophical issues to speak of the "how" of teaching. She states: "far more attention must be given to conversation about, to dwelling in, and to sitting with the teaching act itself (1987, p. xiv). Like Moran she draws on an aesthetic meaning of revelation and then creatively applies it to the nature of teaching. She states "Teaching understood as the revealing of subject matter . . . is perfectly consonant with revelation as a religious doctrine" (p. 63). Second, in reflecting on the process of teaching she weaves together religious and aesthetic metaphors in order to convey that teaching is "an activity of religious imagination" (p. xv). Her language for describing the process of teaching as steps of a dance which call for contemplation, engagement, formgiving, emergence and release (p. 26) challenges religious educators to avoid the pitfall of adhering to technique for its own end. Her use of imagery and

narrative further challenge an over emphasis, still evident today in much religion teaching, on rational explanations for the Holy.

Concurrent with the individual religious educators mentioned above and often with them as contributors, the contemporary approach to religious education is also guided by documents that Catholics refer to as official. Their official nature derives from the fact that they are written by a recognized authoritative group within the church for speaking about religious education. For the sake of brevity only two of them will be mentioned.

An important document, Sharing the Light of Faith (1977) which provides a guideline for evaluating religious education curricula in the United States and which has also been influential in Canada, was produced by the American Conference of Catholic Bishops. This document paid special attention to the cultural and psychological milieu of people as factors affecting the teaching of religious education. The following statement reflects the tone of the document: "Increasingly catechetics is taking into account significant contemporary development in the sacred and human sciences. For some time it has also given particular attention to social justice" (p. 4). A more recent document Catechesi Tradendae (John Paul II, 1979), although it expresses concern for the orthodoxy of the content of the faith, nevertheless, reminds religious educators that "This teaching is not a body of abstract truths. It is the communication of the living mystery of God" (p. 11).

This abbreviated review of the present approach to teaching religious education has pointed out some fundamental dimensions which have gradually formed the consciousness of religious educators and offered principles for the development of religious education curricula. Educated in this approach myself I now stand back from it and ask whether or not the significance of a feminist perspective is included or excluded by this approach? As a way of answering

this question I believe that two basic questions need to be continually raised with respect to this approach. Whose life experience are we speaking about? Whose Christian story are we narrating? The tone of this study indicates that I answer these questions in a personal manner as to how I, as a feminist teacher, might be aware of these questions in my teaching of young people.

Whose Life Experience?

I smile to myself as I think of how often in my many years as a religion consultant I have stressed with the teachers the significance of the student's life experience for entering into an understanding of the Christian message. Enthusiastically emphasizing the theological perspective of ongoing revelation and educational insights with respect to how students learn, I tried in various ways to encourage teachers, brought up like myself in the question and answer era, to embrace the new approach to religious education.

Through the experience and writing of this paper I have come face to face with the question of whose life experience female adolescents might be describing when we ask them to name their "present action." "Present action," according to Groome (1980), "means our whole human engagement in the world . . . what we are doing physically, emotionally,intellectually and spiritually. Since the action arises from the self, the primary object of reflection is the self who reflects" (p. 184, 185). Can female adolescents do this kind of reflecting given the fact that they are socialized in a patriarchal world of meaning that offers them self-definition from that perspective? Whose life experience then are they voicing? Is there, as Simone de Beauvoir might put it, any "truth" to a female adolescent?

Two statements of the young people come to mind in thinking about these questions. The first I have quoted already in Chapter Five. It bears repeating: "God is male, so it's a man's world isn't it? It isn't a ladies world." The second statement was recounted to me by Maria. She had raised some discussion in class about the title of the video the students had been watching, "Man in the Mirror." She told me that one of her female grade nine students came up to her after class and suggested that the title was correct because men have made the world what it is, not women.

In these individual statements and in the general discussion that took place in class it was quite obvious that female adolescents describe their experiences, even when they are reacting to them, in terms of a male-defined world. Examples of this kind of description are offered in the themes presented in this study (Chapters Five to Eight). What can I as a religious educator do to at least begin helping female adolescents name their own "present action?" What kind of teaching is required so that "subjects (female adolescent subjects) can be handed over to themselves" (Harris, 1987, p. 33)?

The answer to this question lies in discovering ways that female adolescents can be helped towards recognizing that learning about themselves in the classroom occurs for the most part within a male perspective. This male perspective has been silent in regards to how females might describe themselves as females. Therefore, females need opportunities to practice "unlearning" this perspective. Ann Louise Brookes (1988) states with respect to educational experiences for women, "knowing our own subjective experience means first learning, and then unlearning male perspectives" (p. 9). The experience of this study has taught me that one of the ways to help female adolescents to recognize "learning" and practice "unlearning" is a consciousness on the part of myself as teacher as to what questions I ask and

how I draw on the questions and statements of both females and males in the class to further this consciousness.

An important learning for me with respect to the teacher as questioner was the time Maria asked as part of an assignment "What do you think as a girl? What do you think as a boy?" Of course these kind of questions don't solve the problem of whether or not girls can think of themselves as girls in order to be able to answer the question. Yet, it is an important question in that it raises the idea of gendered ways of thinking. This kind of question can push the students to step back from the assignment question and ask, "What does it mean for me to think as a girl? as a boy?" Asking a gendered question of myself was the first step in addressing the topic of this study: What does it mean for me as a woman to teach religious education?

Maria's question also challenges the myth of the "genderless" question with respect to learning. As Dorothy Smith states: "The intellectual world spread out before me appears, indeed I experienced it, as genderless" (quoted in Brookes, 1988, p. 97). The problem with "neutral" questions is that they appear neutral while in effect the question, like the learning of the answer, is gendered in favour of male normativeness.

A caution has to be stated with respect to framing the question within a gendered context. For me the intention is not to teach students that girls learn differently from boys on a "natural" basis. While there is a line of thinking within feminism that would advocate the idea of a natural learning difference (Belenky et al., 1986), I would strongly agree with Ann Louise Brookes (1988) that women do not learn differently because they are biologically female. They learn differently because of their experience, whether they are conscious of it or not, of male domination in the very structure of education (Brookes, 1988). In such a setting females may be regarded as different but not for their own sakes.

Madeleine Grumet (1988) explains this subtlety with respect to difference when she states:

> It has been widely argued that schooling supports the dominance of men in society first by exaggerating those characteristics that distinguish male from female gender and then by gradually establishing success norms that favor males. (p. 45)

A first clear answer then to "How do I think as a female? is, "I am socialized to think of myself as a female within the definition of female offered in the patriarchal paradigm." Only after I have been able to make this response can I begin to voice another one. As Magda Lewis (1988) so wisely states: "Locating the barriers we need to speak beyond is the first step in dismantling them" (p. 9). Asking a question such as Maria's, albeit the gender caution mentioned, could be one way of at least "locating the barrier."

Remaining still with the questions of the teacher I return to the way some of the teacher questions were framed in relation to the themes "Equality equals?" and "Going out with smart girls." In the concluding insights on religious education at the end of both these themes I wrote that Maria and I realized that we had promoted the paradigm of male normativeness by staying with the assumptions that equality equals catching up to males, and that smartness in girls can be problematic for males. What we learned from this experience of recognizing our own patriarchal bias is a guideline that I would try to be aware of in my own teaching. The guideline is to practice disengaging myself from the patriarchal bias by challenging the "normative" question. To disengage according to the dictionary means to "break the connection, free oneself from entanglement." I need to free myself and the students from the "normative" question in order to give ourselves an opportunity to imagine what the response to a different kind of question, a question that asks for the

engagement of a female voice, could mean for the way we experience themselves as females, as males.

In relating the themes of equality and smartness to our own lives Maria and I had imagined a different question and response. Resisting, for example, our own question "do we want to be equal to men in administration?" we had asked ourselves "how might we imagine ourselves as women in a leadership position?" We had also imagined that caring, not understood as just something women are assumed to do innately, could become an essential way to define "smartness" (ability), to become an administrator. Again, we were not assuming in our imagining that women are "naturally" different administrators or better administrators. Outsiders to the "privilege" of administration, even though I am one, we have had an opportunity to stand back and learn the male perspective. Given our emerging consciousness of ourselves we haltingly tried to unlearn this perspective by imagining another way.

Reflecting on these discussions between ourselves I realize that we were beginning to state that equality as leaders is not a question of "banging at their door" (Lewis, 1988, p. xii). Rather, we were saying, in concert with Magda Lewis: "What we know (or need to know about administration) is knowledge available to us when we stand on our side of the door" (p. xii). Disengaging ourselves from patriarchal questions could encourage the valuing of "our side of the door" for all students. I will explore this idea in more detail by referring to the theme of "Equality equals?" (Chapter Five) in the way that this theme unfolded mainly around the topic of career expectations.

It is important first of all, as Maria once reminded me, that the patriarchal question is not ignored, "are females equal to males?" To ignore the question is to ignore the reality which sustains it. The reality of females "catching up" to males is one that surrounds adolescents since they live in a world where

women are more and more taking on jobs previously preserved for men. For young females, looking to a career in the near future, the idea of being able to do "men things" is important.

To ask the question then "are females equal to males?" highlights the fact that at least in their day females are "allowed" more career choices than in the past. The question also creates space for the teacher and the students to note, as some students did, that there is a discrepancy to the seeming equality since women can still have the same qualifications as men but be overlooked for the job because they are women. Women may also, as one female student remarked, "have to work harder than men to get the same job."

Staying with this question, even if it is learning how to define one's career expectations within a "male-world," can be beneficial in helping females realize that opportunities are not as "equal" as they appear. This realization is important for female adolescents today who I found for the most part assume that "women's lib" has won the day. The danger is that they do not see that the personal, as in this case their personal career expectations, is still problematic. As feminist educators point out, seeing the "problematic" of one's everyday experience is essential as a way of helping women realize the need for change (Smith, 1987; Weiler, 1988).

Yet it is not enough for female students to just recognize the "problematic" by learning about their absence and efforts to be present in the male world. If they are to engage with subject matter that gives form to their experiences (Harris, 1987) they need practice asking another kind of question -- the kind of question that women and men rarely ask, if ever. For example, with respect to the topic under discussion I could reverse the question and ask, "Are males equal to females?" I believe this kind of question is important as a

beginning way to, as Madeleine Grumet (1988) states in reference to her own work, "let my own (the female student's own) experience surface in the text" (p. 14). Grumet points out the contradiction in her statement since we have no history to "reveal our latent possibilities." Yet she assures us that our experience can surface for "within us resides the power to imagine" (p. 19).

Asking the question, "Are females equal to males?" could help females and males to imagine how equal relationships might look if, for example, men worked just as hard to be equal to females in all the areas traditionally assigned to the latter. Fortunately for these young students there are a number of examples of equal parenting that could be presented to them. The students could also be asked to imagine a world in which only females worked outside the home and men were trying to get into careers reserved for the former. How would the question of equality be answered? Since Maria and I never had an opportunity to explore these kinds of questions I am not sure what kind of responses we would have received. I know that there would certainly have been some exciting discussions. What I do believe about this reversal of the "normative" question is that at least space is created for females to think of themselves as females defining equality.

Similarly the idea of disengagement could have been applied to the theme of "Going out with smart girls." The fact is that the majority of the girls in their written responses did not consider that smartness was a priority in thinking about their relationships with males. They were more interested in friendship itself (Chapter Six). As an aside, but an important one for me to remember as a teacher, it should be noted in this study that females "spoke" more often from their own perspective in written form. As a teacher I could create space for the girls to publicly name their perspective by pointing out the difference in their responses. I remind my readers that of course not all girls, or all boys,

answered the same way on the topics under discussion. I am simply emphasizing the dominant responses given. The importance of relationships presented by the girls disengages them from the images of themselves perceived by the male viewpoint since when they write about themselves they consider the question of smartness either a non-question or at least not a priority.

After I had arrived at this insight of disengaging myself from patriarchal assumptions hidden in questions as well as responses I was delighted to read Magda Lewis' description of feminist teaching in a class with females and males. She attempted to "reposition the women and men in a social configuration that did not take a gendered hierarchy and its attendant practices for granted" (1990, p. 475). She gives an excellent example of this kind of repositioning in her questions about caring.

Concerned with the fact that care-taking was being regarded in word and action by both males and females as the female prerogative she asked the students to think of times when women might expect the same kind of care-taking from men. Specifically she asked if the female students "had even been in the company of a male friend/partner/family member/stranger who, upon seeing their discomfort at the common public display of misogyny in such examples as billboards, had ever offered support for how uncomfortable and violated such displays must make us feel" (p. 475). The response she received is enlightening for what I am trying to suggest as one approach to the same kind of repositioning: "Not only the women, but the men as well, admitted that they had never had such an experience. More to the point, there was general agreement that the possibility had never occurred to them" (pp. 475-476). I believe strongly that the questions we ask as religious educators concerning

the student's "present action" must open up possibilities for females to speak about themselves in ways that had never occurred to them before.

In this section on, "Whose Life Experience?" I have purposely concentrated on the questions I, as a feminist teacher, might ask my students. Yet the teacher as "questioner" image suggests also that the questions and statements of the students need to be supported and challenged in terms of their patriarchal assumptions or resistance to them, as with the case of the girl's statements above on relationships. I think back to the female who said, "men are getting better at helping in the home." Groome's (1980) second movement of his shared praxis has particular merit in this regard in helping students to uncover assumptions hidden in such statements, providing I as teacher include gender assumptions.

Groome speaks of the need for critical reason, critical memory and creative imagination in order to "notice the obvious . . ., break open the hardened shell of the past . . ." and ensure that the future will be more than a "repetition of the past" (pp. 185-186). For example, the girl's statement about "men getting better at helping in the home" could have been challenged by asking, "What is this statement assuming about women, about men, in terms of roles and responsibilities in the home?" An imaginative question could also be asked, "If you as a girl, as a boy, were in the year 2000 what would you hear yourself saying about women in the home, about men in the home?"

There are many examples I could draw from to illustrate the benefit of the kind of gender-conscious questions that can be used to disengage oneself from assumptions. Hopefully, the examples given in this section suffice to demonstrate my intent in this area. The fact that I have concentrated on questions does not mean that I exclude other ways of raising consciousness with respect to female experience as female. These ways include the kinds of

materials I use, how I use them, as well as the manner of treating students in class. These ways have been dealt with in great detail by a number of feminist educators (Bunch and Pollack, 1983; Schniedewind, 1983; Culley and Portugues, 1985; Maher, 1985, 1987; Weiler, 1988).

My contribution to the question of "Whose life experience?" is to say that in order to go beyond a male normative response, operating under the guise of neutrality, it is crucial for me as a teacher to ask and encourage gender-conscious questions that ensure the possibility of a female voice. When female voices speak in class perhaps male voices will sound different (i.e. men writing about men in the "men's section"). I don't know. I only know that partnership or mutuality, which is the Christian vision taking us beyond the 'equals sign,' only occurs when two people can speak fully their own language. As Letty Russell, herself a religious educator, so aptly states: "Full partnership and interdependence is a phase that only becomes possible on the other side (of the door?) of liberation. Persons have to see their reality from a consciousness of equal human dignity and strength in order to find a new focus of relationship in partnership (1981, p.79).

Helping female students to get beyond such concepts and realities as, equality equals being able to do what men can do, by learning to speak with their own voice is a fragile but firm step in the direction of mutuality which does not include an equals sign. For this reason it is crucial that I as a teacher take seriously the significance of life experience for females as well as males. A further fundamental question of myself as a religious educator is to ask if the sharing of the Christian story affirms or denies the search for females to enrich their life experiences. In other words, does the Christian story admit of "ongoing revelation" in the lives of females?

Reviewing the Contemporary Approach

Essential to the contemporary approach to teaching Christian religious education, as has been noted, is an approach which draws the life experiences of individuals into a conversation with their wider Christian story. Groome (1980) in his fourth movement of shared praxis speaks of this drawing together as a "dialectical hermeneutic between the story and participant's stories" (p. 217). This fourth movement asks "What does the community's Story mean for (affirm, call in question, invite beyond) our stories, and how do our stories respond to (affirm, recognize limits of, push beyond) the community Story?" (p. 217). Understood and implemented, Groome's fourth movement pushes both individuals and the total religious community to consider if their experiences are authentic in light of, in the case of Christians, Jesus Christ and his message. In the previous section of this chapter I questioned whether female adolescents could relate their own stories. I now ask a question of the Christian Story. Whose Christian Story is being shared?

In responding to this question I will return to insights gained in the study particularly with respect to the themes of "Could Jesus be a girl?" and "Casting the First Stone" (Chapters Seven and Eight). As with the last section the ideas of learning the male perspective and unlearning it will be considered as ways to become conscious of what the Christian Story might or might not be saying to females.

Yet, before moving to these insights I want to highlight a tension, mentioned several times in this study. A tension with respect to the sense of belonging that Maria and myself feel as part of the Christian community, while at the same time we also feel and know ourselves as strangers in the community. Readers might be shocked to find out that my experiences of certain aspects of

Catholic life sometimes make me feel like a battered woman who doesn't have the courage to leave home. Yet, I also see glimpses in myself and the gathered community that make me believe that the Catholic community can be a liberating place to stay. After all, I belong to a church that has radically changed in the last thirty years. Even though the church as a whole has only just begun to recognize women's voices as an integral part of that change, the fact that there has been change is for me a sign of hope. In considering this tension within myself I have to ask how it affects me as a religious educator who wants to share the Christian Story with young people. The following event is an excellent example of dealing with this tension. In my teaching I know that this same kind of tension would be felt many times.

A Tension - Going to Church With Anna

A few months ago I went to Church with Anna, an inquisitive seven year old, and her family. It was a new parish for me. As I entered the church Anna took my hand and said, "The priest is really nice here." I felt happy to hear her make this statement as I know she is not always keen on going to church. When the female choir director stood up to direct the singing I felt really wonderful. For the first time in a public liturgy I heard someone suggest that we change some words in the hymn (male descriptors for God) in order to include everyone. I found out that she does this frequently and nobody objects. All went well till the second reading from Scripture. It was a reading from the Apostle Paul on wives being subject to their husbands (Ephesians 5: 21-23). I thought of Susan Thistlethwaite's article on, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation" (1985). In this article she demonstrates that this reading from Paul and other similar readings have justified violent

treatment of women. Anna was sitting between me and her mother. I caught her mother's eye and knew that she too was having a similar reaction to the reading. I leaned over to her and said, "I hate this reading." Immediately, Anna asked me, "Why do you hate this reading?" All of a sudden I realized that she was learning in school and at home that the Bible that was being read was special since it was God's Word. How could I explain to her what I hated without her assuming that I reject the essential message of the Bible, which I don't? I quickly covered up my statement and said, "Well it's a very difficult reading but the priest will explain it." She seemed content with my response. I was not.

I knew that the priest would not explain it as Thistlethwaite (1985) had done. He wouldn't let women know that an authentic interpretation of the scripture reading does not lead to the condoning of violence towards women. I have never heard a priest in a public liturgy explain the reading that way. If the Christian story is meant to be also for women that explanation must be included as a corrective to past teaching which allowed an incorrect interpretation. I must add on a positive note that since the time of this event the Canadian Bishops have produced a statement that condemns violence, particularly domestic violence, towards women. This statement, "To Live Without Fear" (National Conference of Canadian Bishops, 1991) has been a welcome sign to many women.

It is my unsatisfactory response to Anna that I bring to my teaching. Like Maria, who was afraid that they might "shoot the whole wad," I find myself fearful in suggesting that patriarchal assumptions, so much part of the Christian Story, should be uncovered with young people. Adolescents are at a crucial time for faith formation. Whether or not they are church goers, whether or not they are positive towards religion, it is my experience of teaching them that they expect

the church (however they perceive it), like their parents, to be there for them as a stable entity. To question the familiar Christian Story could be construed as joining them in their own uncertain questioning. Would I contribute then to further insecurity which would give them, especially the girls, one more reason to reject the church?

Yet in all honesty I cannot cover up as I did with my response to Anna. Male normativeness expressed in such things as the language, ritual, and leadership of the church needs to be named. As mentioned earlier, naming is a first step to "locating the barrier." Yet I also need to find ways that help female students to see that the fact that the Christian Story appears to favor male normativeness is a contradiction to that same Story. What are some of these ways?

Whose Christian Story?

Some of the insights gained in this study point to ways that I can be honest with female adolescents about the male bias expressed in the Christian Story while at the same time helping them to discover a liberating message for themselves in hearing their own voices along with the voices of other women. From these insights I would take a guideline for my own teaching, similar to the one in the last section on, "Whose life experience?" This guideline would be to help them discover there is a disengagement of male-normativeness within the Christian story itself. In other words, the voices of women have always been there bearing witness from their own perspective even if they have not always been heard. The answer to, "Whose Christian Story?" if the whole story is told can be a positive one for females as well as males.

I believe that Maria and I discovered a positive way to engage the students in discovering the Christian Story as inclusive of female voices when we started the scripture study with stories of Jesus' relationship with women. In these narratives, and many more which we could have shared, we were able to show Christ's own rejection of the way women were treated in his day. These narratives also showed the importance of women's voices for giving testimony to Christ. Sharing them from a feminist perspective opened up a new way for the students and ourselves to disengage ourselves from familiar, male-biased interpretations of these stories. An example of this new perspective is given in Chapter Eight with reference to the woman accused of adultery.

The greatest difficulty we encountered was finding appropriate materials for the students to read. One of the goals I have set myself in the future is to interpretively write some stories of women from the Bible and later Christian history that would be appropriate for younger adolescents. I would also encourage young people to write similar stories themselves from their own perspective as females, as males. While the emphasis of this study does not focus on race and culture it is important to state that in my teaching I would encourage these same students to consider how their own backgrounds as well as their gender can make a difference to the way biblical stories are understood.

As noted above Maria and I felt we had raised the students' consciousness with respect to the significance of women's voices through the stories of Jesus' relationship with women. At the same time, however, as can be seen in chapter eight, we ran into difficulty in the discussions on naming and imaging God. The students, like ourselves, have learned to name and image God through the biblical and doctrinal language of their Christian tradition. Listening to the students and noting the difficulty of our responses as teachers

made me aware more than ever of how powerful this language is for upholding male normativeness based on the assumption of a male God. The dilemma for myself as teacher, reflected in my story about Anna, still remains. How do I show respect for the language of the Christian tradition which presents a male God and yet demonstrate to students that naming God this way does not mean that God favors male normativeness?

Obviously one of the ways to answer my question is to demonstrate to students that there are female images for God in the Bible and in later Christian writings. Yet the fact that these images are not highlighted in the liturgy of the Church makes it difficult to show students their importance. Also in exploring some of these female images with students it would be important to recognize that many of these images present females in their traditional domestic role as caretakers of the home and nurturers of others. I hope that this study has shown that while the nurturing of others is an important Christian principle it is problematic to assume that females, because they are females, are the only witness to this principle.

As a religious educator I believe it is essential to provide the students with opportunities to experience God being named and imaged in ways that are inclusive of all persons as well as all creation. In this regard I would use an insight gained from Sallie McFague (1987). In reflecting on the diverse images and metaphors for God used by various biblical authors which reflect each author's cultural and theological perspective she raises the following question: "Does Christian theology involve, either through translation or through interpretation, using the metaphors and concepts of Scripture (and the tradition), or does it involve taking scriptural texts as a model of how to do it, that is of how to do it in the language of one's own time" (p. 30)?

McFague (1987) proposes the radical departure of only using the "founding (i.e. scriptural) images" as model rather than content. I am not prepared to be this radical with young people who are only beginning to be familiar with the content. However, I would also present to the students that this content, drawn from the experience of people in a particular time and culture, provides us with a model of how to search for names and images of God emerging from our own time and experience. In this way I believe female students could see that the Bible itself teaches us to be faithful to our experience as females.

In affirming these positive approaches I am not suggesting that the "absence" (ignored or misrepresented) of women in the Christian Story be overlooked. The positive approach is a way of beginning. A way to demonstrate that there is a "corrective principle" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983) within the Story itself. In this regard the students themselves provided a "corrective principle" to a male image of God by stating that God was not chauvinistic."

With respect to the "absence" of women Maria once told me that she had to deal with a very negative view of the church towards women when she showed them the film The Name of the Rose (edited version). This film describes monastic life in the Middle Ages. While she noted with the students the dreadful way that women were treated by the monks, she also pointed out that there were always men and women who worked for the reform of the church.

Maria Harris suggests the idea of "dangerous memories" as a way of facing up to the negative side of women's place in Christian history while at the same time offering some hope. The idea of "dangerous memories" was proposed by a political theologian, John Baptis Metz. Metz states that these

memories are "memories that we have to take into account, memories, as it were, with a future content" (quoted in Harris, 1988, p. 35). Harris draws on this idea of "dangerous memories" with reference to remembering the lives of women. She speaks of, "memories of suffering and memories of freedom" (p. 35). I cannot deny to my female students that women have suffered and continue to suffer greatly at the hands of a church which has claimed but not practiced liberation for all. But I can also show them that in the past and the present many of these same women have constantly challenged the church which they are part of to be faithful to the liberating message of Christ for all people. In this regard I would see the importance of including stories of women, such as Catherine of Sienna, who challenged the popes in her day to reform their lives. In sharing these stories I would be deeply aware of Judith Dorney's provoking statement that "to continue to neglect or ignore women's voices in this (church) history is to contribute to the silencing of women today (1985, p. 47).

As mentioned earlier the Christian Story includes past, present, and future dimensions. As part of sharing the present it is important to raise contemporary issues with respect to women in the church today. Even if many of the students are not church-goers they are still aware of the church and teachings about the church make up a large part of religious education curricula. I am amazed that even very current religious education curricula ignores any discussion with respect to very current issues such as the ordination of women. John Higgins (1989) noted the same absence of women in a new syllabus for religious education in the Church of England, even though some branches of that church outside England do ordain women. I would heartily agree with him when he states that "it is an appropriate task (of the religious education teacher) to bring a valid and authentic tradition to the notice

of all pupils in ways that will assist them to understand the church's current debate and which will also inform their stance on gender issues in the wider social arena" (p. 60).

As a religious education teacher I can hardly argue for the validity of women's perspective in all aspects of life without showing that many Catholic women are arguing strongly for their voice to be heard in their own church. I would have to be honest with the students about my own feelings in this regard while respecting the different perspectives in the classroom from both females and males. While there was no opportunity to discuss the idea of women priests during this research, I recall the written statement of one girl who stated categorically that ordination was not God's will for women (quoted in Chapter Five). The current debate going on in the church at large needs to find expression in our classrooms as a way of contributing to ongoing change in our church.

The fact that discussions such as the above can be seen as contributing to change is an important belief for me as a religious educator. The Christian Story has a future as well as a past and a present. Metz so aptly points out that memories have "a future content." Integral to the Christian Story is a vision in the future, an inclusive vision. The "memory" of this vision calls us to begin shaping our present towards that future. Letty Russell (1981) speaks of the importance of "the art of anticipation" (p. 97). She states that "in the art of anticipation we never reach a conclusion, because the horizon of God's future moves ahead of us in unexpected ways. The text (reference to Bible) is understood provisionally in the light of confirmation from the other end of history that is yet to be fulfilled" (p. 102). In order to anticipate this future vision Russell says we need to look for "clues" in the texts of the religious tradition and in the daily experiences of our own personal and communal lives. It is essential for

female adolescents to detect that their lives and the lives of other women provide "clues" to the fact that shrouding the Christian Story in patriarchal forms is not faithful to the anticipated final vision of this Story.

Concluding This Study

While I will continue practising my question regarding the significance of a feminist voice for the teaching of religious education to adolescents I hope my study has offered some insightful responses to this question. These responses have been discovered through my work with Maria, my partner-in-conversation, and her students. In sharing this question together and in listening to the experiences of the students we learned to both recognize the painful absence of female voices as well as discover ways to incorporate the strength of their presence in our teaching.

Bringing my question beyond Maria's classroom to the contemporary approach to teaching religious education in our Catholic schools guided by the direction reviewed in this chapter, I recognize that this approach can create space for female voices since it honors individual life experience as well as the narrative telling of the Christian story as the experience of a people with a past, present, and future. However, if the significance of a feminist perspective, described in various ways in this study, is not explicitly named as an integral way of teaching religious education the space can too easily be filled in by male-normative ways of questioning and responding to Christian experience. Naming this significance ensures that females have the opportunity to discover that the liberating message of Christianity means liberation for them, even if in practice the liberating message is not always evident.

At this juncture I hesitatingly move over to the "male-section" of the bookstore. Has the exclusive "women's-section" been good for men? I think so. Maybe men are beginning to realize that a patriarchal viewpoint is also insufficient as a way of describing the "truth" of a male. In this regard I hope the readers of this study will conclude that approaching religious education from a feminist perspective is not ultimately meant to benefit only females. I leave my readers to ponder the analogy of the bookstore.

It is tempting to conclude this study by offering a practical model of "how to" ensure that a feminist perspective is integrated into the present approach to teaching religious education. To do so would be to contradict a fundamental principle of feminism which proposes, in contradistinction to patriarchy, that there is no such thing as a way, a model. I return to my discussion in Chapter Three regarding the question of a distinctive feminist method. As Barbara Du Bois (1989) states with respect to social science, feminism is not a distinctive method in itself. Rather "feminism empowers and requires us to think very differently about the purposes and methods of social science" (p. 109). I would add that likewise, a feminist perspective requires us to think differently about our approach to religious education.

I therefore do not conclude this study by offering a model but rather an invitation to my readers, females and males, to listen to the experiences related in this study. Maybe they will hear their own voices for the first time. Maybe they will recognize that they have been speaking and be affirmed. Borrowing the words of Annie Dilliard (1989) with reference to writing I say to my readers as well as to myself: "When you write (speak for yourself) you lay out a new line of words . . . Soon you find yourself in a new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year"

(p. 3). The last chapter invites the voices engaged in this study to 'lay down their own words' with respect to the significance of this study for them.

CHAPTER TEN

SPEAKING FOR OURSELVES

I believe it is appropriate to end this study by asking if the significance of a feminist voice for teaching religious education was significant for those people engaged in the study. The only way to address this question is to invite the participants to answer this question for themselves.

The student statements are taken from their responses to some questions Maria asked them towards the end of my classroom visits. One of these questions was:

> What have you learned during the discussions in class since the beginning of the year?
>
> About the relationship between women/men in the past?
>
> About attitudes between men/women in the present?

The following statements are representative of the kind of responses given to this question by both girls and boys.

> Girls
>
> I guess I am able to think more, not only my opinion but recognize other people's. I see how serious it was in the past, not like how we are now where we recognize the problem. That is the first step to solving it!
>
> At first I didn't think much of it (reference to making of video) but as we went along I learnt how our society is affected by male attitudes 2000 years ago.
>
> "We" (as in women) have come a long way, but there still is not quite equality between us. Women always fighting on her end and the men afraid (?) of the equality.
>
> I have never realized as I do now that females and males were NEVER equal to each other. Especially since I was brought up this way, I take sexist remarks, etc. with ease.

I learnt that there is in fact a large gap between men and women today.

Well I have learnt many things. One is that I feel men were shovinist (excuse the spelling) in that how we were treated and even hearing the guys' reactions from what was said.

Boys

That through history men have been the dominant race and women looked down upon. There is still a bit of prejudice towards women but they are going further in society than before.

The women are still looked down upon but can succeed if they comply to the rules of a man's world.

Not much has changed but women are now demonstrating.

Women are equal in the sense of careers, etc. but there is still prejudice as to them being fragile.

I have learned that men have learned to treat women better nowaday, that women have become more equal to men.

I have learned that in the past men have been quite sexist towards women. I think that conditions between men and women are constantly improving.

Maria, my partner-in-conversation, introduced herself in Chapter Two. Following are her reflections on this study.

This quest for wholeness as a woman in the church, as a woman in a Catholic classroom, as a woman living out life in this time and this place leaves me gasping for air many times, but somehow it also leaves me with hope. As teacher, I have seen glimmers of a life of wholeness in the friendships of my junior high students, friendships that transcended the face of "boy-girl" and sought out the core of the person. During my junior high years this type of relationship was very rare - we were too concerned with simply talking to "a boy" never mind entering into true friendship.

On the other hand, optimism can blind one to the reality of a situation. Answers to questions I have given students recently are more "wholistic" compared to those given during Barbara's past visits to my classroom. But these changes are not due to some great revelation with respect to women as whole human beings, but rather to women's economic potential as future partners in life. Rather than seeing this as a point of despair perhaps this change, upon reflection and with time, will yield change of the heart.

As teacher I see the need for constant questioning of students about their use of a language that shouts out attitudes which are too easily dismissed as too trivial to bother changing. As teacher, I see as a woman of a particular time and place that my hopes and dreams for wholeness as woman may be out of sync with what these young girls seek. Change is something that is agonizingly slow, but it is also unexpectedly surprising.

Since Barbara's entrance into my class I have also reflected a great deal on my role in the church. Rather than flailing angrily or leaving, I am attempting to achieve some degree of balance in my life. I continuously remind myself of the ideals of the church rather than angrily battering myself against the sometimes ugly realities of a woman's role in the church. This does not mean crushing compromise or wearing blinders. Rather, it means refusing bitterness which is an empty and cold cup, and accepting the challenge and mystery of seeking change that is slow and elusive and not always within my narrow scope of understanding.

Barbara's entrance into my classroom was the beginning of many windows and doors being flung open for me. Perhaps I can continue this process in some small way with other women, in other classrooms. I am most grateful that Barbara blessed me and my students with her presence and would wish for her to carry on this journey into many other women's lives! (Typed from a handwritten copy.)

As for myself, the first originator of the study question and writer of this research, I want to return to a question one of my committee members asked me when I presented my proposal for this topic. He asked if I was concerned that this study could cause me to leave the Catholic church or at least make it

difficult to remain a member. I replied that I was not sure and I still cannot answer this question definitively. I can say that my experience of this study has brought into sharper focus the painful absence of myself as a woman particularly within the Catholic church. Oddly enough, however, I also find myself to be a more hopeful member than I was in the beginning. I also have different views of what membership entails. My hope stems from the fact that I have come to appreciate the gift that I as a woman, as well as other women, bring to our church. Granted we, as gift, are often ignored or misinterpreted. Nevertheless, the gift is there and is beginning to make a difference.

A great source of hope has come from the fact that as I have begun to speak to others about this study a number of both females and males have offered me support in searching for responses to my question. In this regard I must make special mention of my male advisor. His male voice has been in conversation with mine in the writing of this study. As well as our gendered difference we also come from a different theological tradition. Yet we remain in conversation. Therein lies my reason for hope. I have also found ways to prayerfully share with other women my own struggles and strengths. Again I have found hope in knowing that I am not alone and that together we can help each other as Maria Harris (1988) so aptly states "in finding our own voices" (p. 27).

My first reason for hope was expressed in Chapter One. I stated my belief that religious education can make a difference. I continue to be a religious educator because I believe I can share my hope with young people, particularly adolescent females, who are beginning to ask questions about their own identity. Hopefully, they too, will find a supportive community within which to explore the"truth" of themselves.

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